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# **REPORT**

OF THE

**JOINT COMMITTEE  
TO RESTUDY COMITY**

**Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America**

**Home Missions Council of North America**

**1942**

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# REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE TO RESTUDY COMITY

## CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD .....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	7
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	9

## THE REPORT

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND NORMATIVE ACTIONS.....	19
II. CURRENT FORMULATIONS OF COMITY PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES	27
III. SEVEN TYPICAL CHURCH SITUATIONS AND THEIR MEANING TO CO- OPERATIVE CHURCHMANSHIP .....	37
i. New Emergency Situations Frequently of A Temporary Char- acter .....	37
ii. Emergency Adjustments of Old Situations.....	39
iii. Situations Stabilized on Substandard Levels.....	41
iv. Complex Urban Situations often not Adequately Analyzed.....	44
v. Situations Involving Special Populations of non-Protestant Antecedents .....	47
vi. Situations Presented by Sparsely Populated Territory.....	50
vii. Situations Involving the Community Approach.....	51

## APPENDICES:

1. The Original "Master List" Agreement.....	56
2. Urban Comity Principles.....	57
3. Relations of Comity to Church Property.....	59
4. Churches in New Communities from the Standpoint of the Denominational Church .....	60
5. Emergency Housing Larger Parish of Baltimore.....	62
6. Revision of Principles of Comity, Cleveland Church Federation	63
7. City Principles of Comity, Ohio Council of Churches.....	65
8. Action of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.	67
9. Dual Ministerial Membership .....	68
10. Dual Church Membership .....	69
11. Coöperative Ministry in Hospitals and Institutions.....	70

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	71
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## FOREWORD

THE church today is acutely conscious of the need of some comprehensive reordering of its forces. Evidence of this is given by the great multitude of co-operative projects and organizations as well as by the earnest effort to find a basis for ecumenical unity. New situations and problems tax the resources of the church and call for new alignments at the same time that the new insights and impulses of the church seek a fuller expression in fellowship and united action. This many-sided development has made it seem necessary to re-examine the concept of comity as applied to home missions during recent years. Home missions gets its mandate from the church and it has become apparent that comity in home missions can no longer be considered apart from the broader question of co-operation and unity in the church as a whole. Hence this joint committee, representing the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council of Churches.

Comity, in the sense in which the word is often used, is corrective and remedial, whereas co-operation is positive and constructive. Because competition is, comity must be. The problem of comity exists as a carry-over into a period of social maturity of those attitudes and practices that were appropriate to the frontier. On the frontier prevailing standards of religious ministry and an undeveloped sense of community responsibility made tolerable a degree of division and competition which sectarian zeal made inevitable. Today the higher standards of ministry and the urgency of the need of the world make essential that degree of co-operation and unity which the clearing vision of the church as to its essential mission makes compelling. The strong disintegrative trend that for so long characterized American Protestantism has given way to an integrative trend of increasing significance.

This report bears witness to the gradual converging of many streams, all flowing in the same direction. It urges the strategic importance of drawing together developments which have been taking place more or less independently. Most important among these have been the increasing number of local church mergers, the comity adjustments and co-operative projects in home missions, the increase in number and in effectiveness of local, state and general co-operative organizations, the mergers of national denominational bodies, and the development of the ecumenical movement. Important as these all are each is limited in its significance apart from the others.

What is needed is that the problem with which each deals should be viewed as a whole. Do not all these manifestations of unity have a common significance? Do not they all spring from the same impulse? Do not they all seek the same ultimate goal? Is not each a testimony to our need, in the tragedy of these times, to give the cause of Christian unity one all-embracing sanction, uniting our hearts in fellowship, our spirits in aspiration, our voices in witness, and our hands in service?

This report is presented as a modest contribution toward the realization of such high hopes. The progress which it traces and the problems which it analyzes are to be viewed in this wider relationship from which the program presented derives its significance.

HERMANN N. MORSE



## INTRODUCTION

THIS report is the result of action authorized by a joint session of the Executive Committees of the Federal Council of Churches and the Home Missions Council, called to consider "closer unity in home missions," held in New York on March 14, 1941, and presided over by Dr. G. Pitt Beers, President of the Home Missions Council. This session recalled the thirty years of experience in co-operation and the development of comity principles and procedures, which are more fully narrated in Sections I and II below. Current developments, including closer relations of national interchurch agencies, developments of unity in the foreign missions field, and the program of adjustments under the Master List Agreement, were presented by Dean Luther A. Weigle and Secretaries H. Paul Douglass and Mark A. Dawber. Dr. Hermann N. Morse summarized the more general aspects of comity experience.

The joint session then took the following actions:

"RESOLVED: that it is the sense of this joint session:

1. That comity should be interpreted constructively as involving the formulation of a comprehensive strategy of church extension and maintenance for regions and communities, applying equally to self-supporting and to mission-aided churches, for the primary purpose of insuring a well-rounded Christian ministry, according to our highest standards and ideals, to the entire population.

2. That a Joint Committee of these Councils should be appointed to study and make recommendations concerning the entire field of comity, including the restatement and amplification of existing comity principles and procedures so that they may apply more precisely to all types of churches and all types of communities.

3. That all constituent denominations of the Councils which are not a party to the Master List agreement be urged to accept it and so to share in the process of adjusting competitive situations throughout the nation.

4. That both national and local co-operative agencies attempt to work out the application of comity principles as between themselves and the newer sects and, so far as possible, to secure the recognition of comity principles by the more sectarian type of churches.

5. That, to reinforce present denominational and interdenominational efforts in the field of comity, we seek some new and general ecclesiastical action which will put the full weight of the denominations behind a program of comity and co-operation thus broadly conceived and which will enjoin and empower all lesser ecclesiastical jurisdictions and all denominational officials fully to co-operate with other denominations and with interdenominational agencies in the furtherance of the principles of comity and co-operation authorized by their respective bodies.

6. That the Inter-Council Field Department be urged to use every possible means of making more effective the work of existing



state, city and other local interchurch agencies in this comprehensive field of fundamental church strategy, and of developing such agencies where they are not now present."

The Joint Committee created by the second of the above resolutions was constituted by the appointment of five members by each of the co-operating Councils. The Committee met and organized on May 19, 1941, with the election of the Rev. Karl Quimby, D.D., as Chairman, and Mark A. Dawber and H. Paul Douglass as co-Secretaries. The Secretaries were instructed "to collate materials on comity under the heads of (1) facts as revealed by field studies in connection with the Master List and (2) current comity agreements with reference to the development of more radical principles." A preliminary report of work resulting from these two instructions was presented to a second meeting of the Committee on June 1, 1942, under the titles "Some Typical Church Situations and Their Meaning for Co-operative Churchmanship" and "Current Comity Agreements of Local and State Councils of Churches and of Co-operating Denominations". These were accepted and approved and their circulation for discussion and criticism authorized.

This present complete report revises and supplements the preliminary report in the light of further comments and consultations.

The main methods employed in the study are suggested by the contents of the Report. It consists of (1) a historical section compiled from the records of the co-operative agencies; (2) a summary of current principles and policies based on answers to a questionnaire and supporting documents; (3) an analysis and interpretation of typical situations as disclosed by field studies. The findings which precede the body of the Report in the text generalize on the basis of the whole data and suggest measures of implementation. The conclusions thus based in large measure upon new firsthand field studies, give the Report the quality of a fresh induction from objective contemporary evidence. The geographical areas of study included two rural counties (Hunterdon, N. J. and Tioga, N. Y.) somewhat typical of the eastern seaboard states; a vast army camp newly cut out of a national forest in the thinly settled Ozark region (Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri); the inter-mountain region (Utah, southern Idaho, and the margins of adjoining states); Oriental churches and missions (chiefly Presbyterian) in ten communities up and down the Pacific Coast visited during the early stages of Japanese evacuation; one of the most strategic of American defense localities (the Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton area); and the Presbyterian Churches of Metropolitan Philadelphia. The time occupied in field work was approximately four months. In most of the areas covered, local reports were rendered and hearings were held, either interdenominationally or for the denominations concerned. In addition, national consultations were held and reports made on several of them.

The complete report now is presented by the Joint Committee for consideration and action by the appointing bodies.

The Committee has attempted only to cover the limited field assigned to it for study. The scope of the Report is therefore narrower than the interests represented in the joint session which created the Committee. It omits the dozen or more other typical forms of co-operative activity which are equally characteristic of the interchurch movement of American Christianity, and of which comity is part and parcel.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this section is to offer an abbreviated summary of findings as a short method of presenting the most essential conclusions of this Report. It should be studied with reference to the frequent citations to the body of the Report. The findings constitute in effect a series of recommendations for consideration by co-operating agencies which may desire to take action in the field of comity.

### I. COMITY STRONGLY ESTABLISHED IN THE HABIT AND PRACTICE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

1. We find that comity constitutes *an inherent feature of the co-operative movement*. The churches can take no future step in working together without, by the same token, being compelled to ask how their still separated units shall behave toward one another now that they have undertaken to act as one. How shall church A behave with respect to its neighboring church B on the opposite corner? What shall denomination C, wanting to enter the same territory as denomination D, do about it? Under the necessity of meeting these challenges comity is and has been an almost invariable feature of the co-operative movement with slight regional exceptions. By far the larger number of co-operative organizations have specific commissions or committees to administer this interest. (See p. 27.)

2. We also find that comity is more than an ancient tradition. It is definitely *an area of contemporary concern and development*. Of Councils of Churches replying to our questionnaire two-thirds said that they had recently reformulated or reaffirmed comity principles. Stressing and implementing action is the order of the day, coupled with a somewhat critical attitude toward the older formulations, growing out of immediately current problems and insights. (See p. 28.)

3. Formal comity statements by Councils of Churches reveal *varying degrees of articulateness* as to its larger meaning. We fail to find any very adequate exposition of the philosophy and sanctions of comity in any of the recently reaffirmed statements of principle (p. 29). Comity, in short, is an expression of the practical temper of the church confronted with the challenge to Christian behavior between denominations. Only casually have those practicing it probed its deeper issues. These deeper issues clearly relate to divergent conceptions of the church. Comity places and displaces local churches. For example, the denominations collectively create a situation in which all Christians here are asked to become Methodists; elsewhere Baptists or Presbyterians. But this implies the essential interchangeability of the local churches of these denominations. Denominations which feel "unique" with respect to the validity of their ministries or the correctness of their sacraments cannot easily admit such interchangeability.

At the risk of seeming to raise difficulties, it is our judgment that it is more wholesome to realize what is involved in comity and to confront its profounder issues than it is to "let sleeping dogs lie." The profounder issues are at least kept in mind throughout these findings. (See p. 24; also "A New Chapter in Co-operative Churchmanship," by H. Paul Douglass, in *Christendom*, Winter, 1942, p. 98.)



## II. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE PRESENT AND THE PAST

1. We find that the *prevailing earlier concept* of comity has been *modified and significantly transcended*. Stress has shifted from the negative to the positive; from the idea of the denominations keeping out of each other's way in the establishment of churches, to that of constructive churchmanship whereby the denominations *together* work out a comprehensive religious strategy for whole areas or communities. This changed viewpoint was registered in the first finding of the joint session (March 14, 1941) of the Executive Committees of the Federal Council and Home Missions Council which appointed the present committee:

RESOLVED: that comity should be interpreted constructively as involving the formulation of a comprehensive strategy of church extension and maintenance for regions and communities applying equally to the self-supporting and to mission-aided churches for the primary purpose of insuring a well-rounded Christian ministry according to our highest standards and ideals to the entire population.

This expanded version is implicit in the current reaffirmations of comity even when the older phraseology (defining comity as "mutual co-operation, respect and good will") is still retained.

2. It follows from this enlarged concept that the *adjustment of specific issues* increasingly takes place within a *comprehensive common purpose and plan* formulated through the co-operative study of community needs. Comity now is not so much the adjudication of controverted cases one at a time as it is the blueprinting of a master plan within which all specific situations may be happily provided for. Specific proposals are not cases brought by divergent interests to be tried under agreed codes of procedure but rather measures suggested toward the carrying out of the common purposes. We indeed find evidences of a considerable body of conviction that comity on a piecemeal basis under legalistic sanctions is unworkable. If it is to operate at all it must operate within the larger conception of constructive churchmanship.

3. We find however that the *need of securing competency and continuity in the process of developing a common strategy* is very unequally recognized and implemented. Competency and continuity at this point are imperative necessities. But few Councils provide a definite agency charged with this duty—as Chicago does in its sub-Committee on Strategy within the Comity Commission. This committee continuously plans "the conduct and development of co-operative Protestantism" and recommends on all matters of general strategy, while the Fields Committee deals with specific cases as they arise. (Comity Commission of the Chicago Church Federation—*Principles and Rules*, 1941, pp. 4 and 6.) Decisions are usually reached in the light of general knowledge, reinforced by limited and often superficial surveys of particular situations. We recognize the grave difficulty of financing competent basic studies which confronts Councils with limited budgets. But it is submitted that halfway measures at this crucial point can only be disastrous. If comity is truly to mean comprehensive constructive churchmanship it must be based on adequate research, followed by the faithful use of approved conference methods. But it is not comity alone which requires this basis. Any administration of religious education which deals with the needs of particular areas, any objectively directed social welfare program, any evangelistic cam-



paign based on the districting of areas—to say nothing of the financial cultivation of constituencies—requires a discovery of many of the same underlying facts which are necessary for general strategy. Research processes basic to comity are also basic to most of the other phases of a Council's work; and the cost divided among several departments need not seem prohibitive.

### III. INFLUENCE OF CHANGED GENERAL ATMOSPHERE

1. *The ecumenical movement furnishes an important reinforcement to the enlarged concept of comity.* The growth of this movement reflects a changed general atmosphere favorable to interchurch co-operation, and furnishes a new undergirding of enormous strength for comity as constructive churchmanship. It challenges the co-operating churches to make good locally their ecumenical aspirations and professions. The effect of the ecumenical idea on the religious atmosphere is seen in the fact that the Joint Field Department of the national interchurch agencies has recently adopted as its current slogan, "Making ecumenicity local."

2. *Comity thus becomes the characteristic expression of local ecumenicity.* It means behavior between local units of the denominations as parts of the one church of Christ in a given community, evidenced by their working together to a common plan for providing religious ministries for all the people—in contrast with behavior dictated by denominational advantage.

3. *The new ecumenical temper already strongly affects denominations which have not usually shared in comity agreements* in the past and reaches into communities where no organized agencies of interchurch co-operation exist. Certain American denominations have joined the World Council of Churches which do not belong to the Federal Council. It is not too much to hope that the practice of comity will outstrip its organizational forms, so that without previous agreements all churches concerned, for example in temporary communities such as war industrial developments, shall feel impelled to work under common plans. (See p. 37.) Meanwhile the prospective shortage of ministers as well as of transportation facilities and fuel is likely to necessitate a temporary doubling up of many local congregations. This accidental necessity, backed by the more ecumenical temper now prevailing, should open the way for a great increase in the spirit and practice of local unity. (See p. 39.)

### IV. RECOGNIZED SCOPE AND DIRECTION OF COMITY

1. Situations obviously requiring *comity* adjustments, as partially listed and analyzed in Section III of this Report, are so many and so varied that adding them all together *implies the substantial rechurching of the United States.* The Master List Agreement between the Boards of seven denominations is well along with the removal of duplicatory missionary appropriations from national Boards throughout the nation. Comity has been recognized as applicable to one field after another until it is now clear that it means a new basis for home missions and the undoing on a vast scale of the unwisdom of the past on a continent-wide basis. Comity thus involves a radical change in the total ecclesiastical situation.



2. Besides recognizing the broadening scope of comity it is now understood that *the movement needs to intensify in a new direction*. The current stress is upon *carrying comity downward to the local units* of denominations which have already given consent to and are largely practicing it at the top. This necessity has been increasingly voiced for the last fifteen years and its general acceptance found expression in the action of the joint session of the Executive Committees of the Federal Council and the Home Missions Council, as follows:

RESOLVED: that to reinforce present denominational and inter-denominational efforts in the field of comity, we seek some new and general ecclesiastical action which will put the full weight of the denominations behind a program of comity and co-operation thus broadly conceived and which will enjoin and empower all lesser ecclesiastical jurisdictions and all denominational officials fully to co-operate with other denominations and with interdenominational agencies in the furtherance of the principles of comity and co-operation authorized by their respective bodies.

Examples of proposed actions on these lines are found on pages 67 and 68 of the Appendices.

3. We find that this process of carrying comity down to the local denominational units is being met halfway by a *movement upward generated by community needs and aspirations*. This "rising tide of the community spirit" was already recognized as long ago as the Cleveland Comity Conference of 1928 and has repeatedly found concrete expressions in the development of varying forms of community churches. (See pp. 47-49.)

Comity thus has enormous consequences. It involves the rechurching of America in a new spirit. The next area of its intensive application is to be found in the scores of thousands of competitive self-supporting churches—self-supporting only in the sense that they exist on a substandard level without outside financial aid. Its aim is to bring the best possible religious privileges to the hundreds of thousands of American communities now not only divided by denominationalism but poorly served by the multiplicity of church organizations.

## V. PERSPECTIVE IN IMPLEMENTATION

Our review of the different situations which specifically call for the practice of comity, coupled with our study of its evolution and current expressions, provides us with a certain perspective as we come to point out the promising lines of its practical implementation.

1. *The most extensive problem of comity concerns the rural church*. More particular communities, more separate congregations, more ministers, more local church officials, more local traditions and prejudices, are involved under this aspect than under any other. In line with the repeated surveys and other studies of the rural church, we find that tens of thousands of local congregations exist only on a substandard level, that they are necessarily served by an unsatisfactory part-time ministry, and are unable to carry out the minimum ideals of worship, religious education, organization or service assumed as standard by their respective denominations. Many do not measure up to their potentialities. They are relatively expensive, and hard to defend as suitable units of the church of Christ in the modern world. Comity finds



its most diffused task here. At the same time comity has gone further in understanding and in formulating principles applicable to the rural field than it has in any other direction. (See pp. 39-41.)

2. *The most complex problem of comity is that of the urban and suburban church.* Not only is urban society uniquely dynamic and uncontrollable, but an unresolved tension lies at the heart of the situation—that between the central churches and the peripheral and suburban churches. The former need to hold their scattering memberships in order to continue their ministries in the increasingly depleted downtown sections of the cities; the latter need to draw on the strength and prestige of the older churches in order to get adequately started in the more promising newer areas. This tension exists within denominations quite as much as between them. Added to the inherent difficult problems of urban structure and change, this situation makes the principles of comity applicable to the urban field hardest to understand and formulate as well as most problematical in execution. At the same time specific urban situations can almost always be resolved by a penetrating analysis and decisive action. At best, however, the largest proportion of unsolved comity problems probably pertain to the urban field. (See pp. 44-47.)

3. *The vast sparsely populated areas of the nation, particularly the mountains and the semi-arid plains of the West, continue to present persistently special problems* which become even more distinctive as the rest of the country urbanizes. Especially tested techniques of occupancy and service, based on thorough-going co-operative planning, are doubly necessary here, but as yet have not been fully developed. The best thought of experts on rural social adaptations needs to be focused on this problem and experimentation undertaken and carefully appraised. A new mood to co-operate in the solution of this problem is obviously exhibited by the religious forces of the Intermountain Area. (See pp. 50-51.)

4. *Exceptional populations—diverging from the dominant American type in race, language and often in religion, many of them also living on the remoter fringes of national territory—continue to present special problems for comity.* Many of these populations are becoming less exceptional as the assimilative forces of national life prevail. For these the normal methods of comity, as developed by the churches of American origin in city and country, are increasingly available. Especially should exceptional populations of Protestant antecedents be brought as rapidly as possible to share the ordinary comity attitudes and procedures. (See pp. 47-50.)

It must at the same time be recorded that the churches of the Negro group, the largest and most important of the exceptional populations of Protestant faith, have scarcely begun to recognize the claims of comity with one another. Most Negroes belong to completely independent denominations which, in the main, have never come into working partnership with Councils of Churches in the matter of comity as relates to Negro denominations. In brief, this entire chapter of co-operative development still remains to be written by these churches; and it is of outstanding importance that they should begin immediately.

5. In all types of situations it is increasingly recognized that the *standards of the ministry to be performed are involved in comity practices* as well as the occupancy of fields by churches. This is clearly expressed in the "Comity Principles Applicable to Town and Country Fields," an epochal statement



adopted by the Home Missions Council in 1928 (p. 22) and has had increased recognition ever since. Co-operative churchmanship seeks to provide not just enough churches but enough *good* churches; and comity decisions can never ignore this condition. Thus, before the assignment of any field to a denomination, the Chicago Comity Principles require an investigation "as to the intention and ability of the communion making the request to provide adequately for the religious needs of the community;" and the definition of comity set forth for this Committee by the appointing bodies specified the insuring of "a well-rounded Christian ministry according to the highest standards and ideals."

6. The realization of even *minimum standards of ministries by local churches inexorably demands a reduction of their number* in many communities. The changed pattern of civilization involves a greater centralization of most rural institutions. The declining neighborhood can no longer expect a church or a school at its front door. This is in the interest of religion and of education as well as of the people involved. But the working out of the process should nowhere mean a reduction of religious or educational opportunity, but rather their enrichment.

The practical corollary of this proposition is that centralizing changes must always be matched by decentralizing processes. When changes are undertaken in the interests of standards or of improved ministries of any sort, a first requirement is that they must not narrow the scope of the services rendered. Quality must not be sought too exclusively at the expense of quantity. Practically speaking this means that, when a local church is closed, religious ministries to the people of the area must be intensified. Their memberships may properly be transferred to a more distant church. But the people themselves must all the more be sought out and cultivated. Pastoral ministries must be personalized through visitation, enrollment, the bringing of the fellowship and sacraments of the church into their homes. They must have full access to the decentralized ministries of the church through the formation of neighborhood units for prayer and fellowship.

7. *The authority of comity is Christian reason and goodwill* using the methods of friendly association and counsel. By such means the churches have established the habit of comity. These are equally the means for securing wider adherence to comity practices. Numerous successful experiences of Councils of Churches show that comity represents education in the values of mutual planning—not surrender to authority. Formal agreements in advance always to accept comity decisions are relatively rare; and while it is our judgment that a carefully considered and reasonably comprehensive statement of the scope and method of proposed comity procedures will help any Council or Federation to succeed in this field, we should like to see such statements made so self-evidencing that they would appeal equally to those churches which have officially committed themselves to the use of comity methods and those which have not.

8. It is our further conviction that *the conference process*, operating according to recognized techniques based upon experience and applied to interchurch adjustments, *may become an organ of the leadership of the Holy Spirit* within the church, without denying or depreciating any historic form of usage. Christians of the separate communions may properly entrust themselves to the divine leadership through this form and should confidently



expect to be guided to right decisions in the performance of common tasks. This is the ultimate authority of comity.

9. The *war emergency greatly accentuates and remotivates comity*, but it does not originate any general unique problem nor require any essentially novel solutions. The basic principles of comity as developed for typical situations in town, country, and city and for special populations, should prevail in all war emergency situations. We particularly urge a fair distribution of concern between the drastically exigent need of co-operative planning and service in war camps and industrial communities and the equally basic need in the more familiar and wide-spread situations representing the normal case of the rural and urban church. We anticipate that war-time pressure will spread to multitudes of communities only indirectly affected by military and industrial concentration. Loss of population, ministers and financial strength will be felt in communities everywhere. Wherever this occurs the readjustment of local religious organizations under comity principles will have the sanction of patriotism as well as of religious loyalty. (See pp. 41-47.)

## VI. MAJOR IMPLEMENTING MEASURES

Of specific measures necessary to implement comity we wish to emphasize the following:

1. *Empowering action in behalf of comity should be taken by all denominations*, authorizing and enjoining their lesser ecclesiastical jurisdictions to adopt the procedures approved by the general Boards, and instructing local denominational officials to co-operate with other denominations and with interdenominational agencies in the furtherance of the principle of comity authorized by their respective bodies. This has already been approved by action of the joint session of the two bodies which set up this Committee. An Appendix (p. 67) shows the form in which this empowering action was taken by the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.

We also commend empowering action by denominations with respect to dual ministerial standing along lines also pioneered by the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., which has passed down to the presbyteries for action an amendment to the Form of Government recommended by the Department of Church Co-operation and Union. It provides that Presbyterian ministers may serve federated churches of which one unit is Presbyterian without impairment of ministerial standing and gives non-Presbyterian ministers of such churches temporary membership in presbyteries. (See p. 68.)

We are also convinced that under exceptional circumstances it ought to be possible for local churches to belong to more than one denomination. Our data show enough cases of churches actually sponsored or supported by two or more denominations acting jointly to convince us that such situations should be legitimatized. A church located in a government housing project suburban to Milwaukee recently applied to the Wisconsin Council of Churches to be recognized as affiliated with all the churches associated in the Council. We think that the Wisconsin Council was right in recognizing this church on such terms, and that churches in similar situations should not be left with the alternative of belonging to a single communion or none. The best protection of the denominations against community churches becoming entirely disconnected is to allow them to have more than one formal connection whenever



they are supported by two or more denominations or have the sanction of interchurch bodies. (See p. 51.)

2. The joint session of the two bodies which set up this committee recorded the conviction that *comity should apply "equally to self-supporting and mission-aided churches."* In view of the joint session's approval of the extension of the Master List Agreement to denominations not now party to it, we believe that the Master List method should now be applied to all churches. This would mean the listing of all churches, community by community, county by county and state by state; the identification of all churches that seem duplicatory according to recognized standards; and a concerted effort through interchurch consultation and action to adjust the situation so as to make the best possible religious provision for all American people. However far the process might go, a nation-wide pattern would have been established toward which to work; and experience justifies the expectation that very large numbers of adjustments might be expected promptly.

3. We further anticipate that *many communities* and perhaps states and regions *would desire to adopt time-schedules* within which to work out local adjustments. Adjustments would naturally go forward more rapidly in some areas than others but the discipline of working to a schedule would be helpful to the slowest as well as to the most ready. The nation-wide effort would thus find means for systematized guidance.

4. The *denominations should definitely authorize their officials and Boards to make interdenominational adjustments in work for exceptional populations.* United work in many phases of home missions has proved easier to accomplish than in the case of self-supporting churches, as had also been the case in foreign mission fields. The Executive Committee of the Federal Council on June 7, 1939, approved in principle "the unification by all member denominations of all home mission phases and activities which are in the nature of services to exceptional populations," and voted that this measure be commended to all member denominations. Priorities as to the carrying out of this ideal should quickly be agreed to, as to the various fields and populations concerned, and their unification should be carried out, beginning perhaps with Alaska. (See pp. 47-49.)

5. *Definite consultation should be had with the co-operating communions* in order that appropriate action may be taken nationally. These findings should similarly be brought specifically to the attention of all Councils of Churches and permanent ministers' associations.

## VII. NEED OF NEW TERMINOLOGY

We think that *this should probably be the last comprehensive report on "comity" ever to be made.* The word is too negative and too meager to suggest the field analyzed and described in this Report. The thing with which we are concerned is essentially the adjustment of local interchurch relations. "Adjustment" was the characterizing term used in connection with the Home Missions Council's Five Year Program initiated in 1928. The term "co-operation" indicates the wider phases of interchurch relations which fall short of unity; it includes the specific phase of co-operative planning. Comity looks both to this co-operative planning and to carrying out of the things planned. An agency designated as a "Commission on Church Planning and the Adjust-



ment of Local Interchurch Relations" would equally suggest the planning phase of local co-operation and the function of dealing with cases or issues as they arise. This term would be accurate as a substitute for "comity" but is obviously too long for practical use. We would commend to Councils of Churches and national agencies the effort to find a term which will express what they mean by comity.

### VIII. CONTRIBUTION OF COMITY TO UNITY

1. *Co-operative unity*, while not the final phase or the goal of unity, *is real and objective unity*. So declared the Edinburgh World Conference Report (VI-ii).<sup>\*</sup> It preserves, yet adds to, the structure of denominationally organized Christianity. It operates internationally and on the national and the regional levels, as well as locally; but it is most essentially the working out of relations *locally* through Councils and Federations of Churches and other forms of co-operative organizations. As already insisted, co-operative unity within communities is essentially local ecumenicity.

2. *Comity*, as a form of adjusting local interchurch relations, *deliberately preserves the denominational church* as the norm of organization by which communities are to be served. This has been repeatedly recorded as the conclusion of home missionary comity conferences. (See p. 22.) The reason for this conclusion has been thoughtfully formulated by the Chicago Church Federation in a document appearing below in the Appendices (p. 60). Co-operative unity, as interdenominationally exercised, expresses no tendency to abandon denominational local forms. These forms, however, now appear within a new framework: namely, that of co-operative Christianity.

3. But, neither as an aspect of unity nor as committed to guidance by experience, does the *co-operative adjustment of local situations promise to preserve the denominational forms inevitably in every case*. Attempts to plan comprehensively for communities reveal generally recognized exceptional cases, in which neither the external situations nor the well-established desires of the people involved can be best served by a denominational church. Under these circumstances a variety of non-denominational solutions have been developed by experience and should be accepted as equally legitimate—with the assumption that in any case a jointly approved project shall be formally related to some denomination *or to more than one* in a definite and orderly manner. (See pp. 63-64.)

4. In the formulation of working procedure for the local adjustment of interchurch relations, *provisions must be made for legitimatizing such exceptions to the conventional denominational pattern*. Thus a good many exceptional adjustments are being made for the sake of administrative convenience. A union church is interdenominationally set up, because the co-operating denominational executives or Federation offices feel that that is the best way to handle the matter in a given case. They should have no hesitancy in adopting this solution when it is really more appropriate to the situation than any other.

As already suggested, provision must also be made for allowing adjustments to fall in with definite community purposes. Thus the Chicago, Cleve-

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<sup>\*</sup> The Seminar on Comity and Co-operation held in Cleveland, Ohio, December 9, 1942 approved an addition to this paragraph reading: "This necessarily includes faith in Christ through the Scriptures."



land and other comity statements set forth the principle that, *when the people of a community deliberately choose to have a church which is not limited to one denomination, they should be guided and assisted in securing such a church*, with safeguards as to orderliness and efficiency of their procedure. There should be a general definite acceptance of this principle. The desirability of enabling action by the denominations legitimatizing multi-related local churches has already been suggested.

5. *The most far-reaching exception in principle to adjustment within the denominational tradition is found in united regional churches supported by several denominations but belonging to none*, as for example in Santo Domingo. A similar arrangement is under discussion for Alaska. This solution should be considered for still other fields for which it is applicable. The Lambeth Conference of August, 1930, described the proposed United Church of South India as no longer a part of the Anglican Communion but as in full communion with it. The United Church of Canada remains in unbroken fellowship and has representative standing in the international bodies of all three denominations from which it sprang. Comity, then, may be supplemented by ecclesiastical union in exceptional cases, while still adhering in principle to the denominational forms.

6. In this as in the whole round of adjustment between Christian denominations, *we look with confidence forward to the guidance of experience and of the Spirit of God*. We anticipate that barriers still existing between us will be progressively removed and that wide open doors will be set up before us. The churches of our children, please God, shall work together more closely and serve the Kingdom of God better than did the churches of our fathers or than we are now able to do through the existing divided churches.

*These Findings were approved by the Home Missions Council of North America and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in December 1942.*



# THE REPORT

## I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND NORMATIVE ACTIONS

THIS Report is an effort to register and interpret American experience in the practice of comity and to reformulate its principles with reference to greater efficiency. As will be shown later, similar summaries have been made in the past. The instruction to the Joint Committee to make a "restudy" of comity itself implies a continuity of endeavor. This immediate section of the Report attempts to bring together what the past contributes to the present inquiry, and to record the chief documents which have been accepted as normative in this field.

### COMITY PART OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT OF PROTESTANT CO-OPERATION

While it would be instructive to trace the effect of the development of comity as practiced on the foreign mission field through a large part of the last century, and to show its attenuated survivals from earlier American unity movements such as the Schmucker plan (1838) and the Presbyterian-Congregational plan of union, the current phase of comity principles and practice dates from the rebirth of the movement of Protestant co-operation in the United States during the first decade of the present century, as signalized by the organization of the Federal Council of Churches and the Home Missions Council, both in 1908.

### COMITY A PHASE OF CO-OPERATION

Comity is best understood as one component within the total motive and many-sided practice of Protestant co-operation. In the earliest naive phases of the movement the main immediate stress was upon joint action by the associated denominations in numerous fields of Christian service. Thus the call for the preliminary meeting of 1905, which initiated the Federal Council, enumerated "all questions like that of the saloon, marriage and divorce, Sabbath desecration, the social evil, child labor, relations of capital and labor" and others, as questions "in which the voice of the church should be heard." Second thought necessarily raised the question of the relation of the local units of the co-acting denominations to one another. These Christian bodies might undertake joint work; but they were, nevertheless, to continue as separate denominational entities and would have local congregations whose location and fortunes would affect those of other local units. This fact would raise the obvious question of their *relationships with respect to these separately operating units*. Some of them are conscious rivals. If denomination A seeks an advantageous field in which to start a new church, it is quite likely that



denomination B, and perhaps C also, has the same idea. If a church is planning to move, its neighbor church of another denomination may be thinking of moving into the same locality.

The realization of this certainty led to the emergence of comity practices in the early 1900's. These appeared almost simultaneously, in parallel versions under the auspices of the two major agencies of Protestant co-operation; namely, local and state Councils of Churches, and, nationally, the home mission Boards. The Philadelphia Federation of Churches, for example, was speaking about comity in 1909 in the very terms popularized by the home missions agencies, and had entrusted this responsibility to a "church extension" committee. Almost from the beginning the two streams tended to merge. Numerous Councils of Churches ultimately adopted as their comity committees the existing organizations of local church extension superintendents, and several Home Missions Councils gradually evolved into full-fledged State Councils.

Meanwhile the changed pattern of rural America, tending to centralize life in town-centered communities, had led to a widespread renaissance of community spirit resulting in a demand for comity from the bottom up as well as from the top down. (See H. Paul Douglass, "Church Union from the Ground Up" in *Christendom*, Vol. 1, No. 5.) This insight was early voiced by the Ohio State Council of Churches and others.

## TWO DECADES OF EXPERIMENTATION

The most extensive expressions of the development of comity in the pioneering period are found in the several studies and campaigns initiated by the Home Missions Council, particularly in the states of the West and Northwest. From 1913, the Home Missions Council had maintained a special committee on comity and co-operation and had secured agreements from the Boards of numerous denominations on the following points: (1) not to start new churches without consultation, (2) to consider cases of complaints when it was felt that the action of one denomination in the local field was detrimental to another, and (3) that, where circumstances justified, one denomination should retire from an overchurched field in favor of another. The State and City Councils of Churches meanwhile went far in the development of agreements and specific procedures for handling comity "cases" in the urban and suburban fields, so that a comprehensive study in 1928 was able to examine the records of 417 cases in 16 cities. (H. Paul Douglass, *Church Comity*, pp. 81-94.) Thus by the end of two decades the practice of comity was firmly incorporated into the co-operative movement, both in its home missionary (and chiefly rural) phase and in its locally self-directed urban aspect.

## NORMATIVE ACTIONS

The evolution of comity reached a culminating level for the pre-depression years, particularly from 1929, the date of the National Church Comity Conference held in Cleveland, Ohio. This Conference was called jointly by the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ. Its findings reviewed and commended the progress of comity in the several forms indicated above, and projected a Five-Year Program of Survey and



Adjustment in the Field of Interdenominational Comity in Home Missions. The objectives of this program were stated as follows:

(a) The elimination within a definite period of all competition between denominations whose Boards are constituent to the Home Missions Council and the Council of Women for Home Missions in which the use of home mission funds is involved.

(b) The furtherance of understandings between denominations constituent to the Home Missions Council, Council of Women for Home Missions, or the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, looking to the elimination of competition in which home missions funds are not involved.

(c) The allocation of responsibility on a non-competitive basis for needed extensions of Christian work and securing the acceptance of such allocations by the bodies concerned.

(d) The securing of co-operation of the bodies concerned in the initiation of any necessary projects to be conducted jointly, as, for example, the formation of interdenominational Larger Parishes, the joint provision of religious education facilities, the provision of unified religious services at public institutions, Farm and Cannery Migrants, Religious Work Directors in Government Indian Schools, Bureau of Reference for Migrating People, etc.

(e) Strengthening or creating the necessary interdenominational bodies, local or regional, to assist in carrying the above points into effect and to provide channels for co-operative action in other fields of interest.

(f) Securing a special fund for the attainment of the above objectives. (Findings of the Cleveland Conference on Comity in the *Minutes of the Home Missions Council* for 1928.)

The first of the above findings was later implemented by the Master List agreement (p. 56). The second has not yet been carried out, but its necessity is strongly reinforced by this present study.

## RELIGIOUS SELF-DETERMINATION FOR COMMUNITIES

Perhaps the most important advance in principle registered by the Cleveland Conference was the limited recognition of the principle of community decision as to the forms which the co-operative spirit should take within a given community. The finding on this point read as follows:

We have heard, with deep concern, at this conference, of the tragic condition in rural America. The reduction of the rural population and the depletion of rural income call for action on the part of all those who are in position to ease the present burden borne by rural America. Therefore,

We commend that rising tide of community spirit which is leading some rural communities to exercise a new discrimination in determining the number of agencies by which they shall be served.

Furthermore, we believe that the time has come when American religious life must organize in larger religious units. We realize that the way in which this can be accomplished will vary in accordance with the nature of the community and the genius of the religious organizations which are found therein.



Because we believe in the principle of regional autonomy, we will encourage the efforts of our Protestant Christian brethren to overcome the religious maladjustment which our multiple sectarian organization has thrust upon them. Massachusetts has had twenty-five years of successful experience with the federated church. While under favorable circumstances we would prefer a community church affiliated with a denomination, we would say nothing here to discourage churches not so affiliated as experiments. (Findings of the Cleveland Comity Conference, in *Minutes of the Home Missions Council*, 1928.)

## COMITY PRINCIPLES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Still more definite and far-reaching normative action had been taken somewhat earlier in the formulation, by the Joint Committee on Comity and Co-operation of the two Home Missions Councils, of "Comity Principles Applicable to English-speaking Work in Town and Country Fields," which by 1928 had been adopted by the home missions Boards of eight denominations and by a considerable number of State Councils of Churches. These Principles were as follows:

1. A field shall be regarded as adequately occupied when for each 1,000 population, homogeneous as to language and color and reasonably accessible from a given point, there is present one church meeting at least the following minimum standard of service and equipment:

Resident pastor devoting full time to work of the ministry.

Public worship every Sabbath.

Sunday school meeting regularly.

Edifice reasonably adequate to needs of the community for worship, religious training and service;

*provided* that where a church has or is proposed to have the exclusive occupancy of a field it will receive in Christian fellowship all varieties of Evangelical Christians without subjecting them to doctrinal or other tests which do not accord with the standards of their respective faiths.

2. Conversely, a condition of over-churching and competition shall be held to exist where the number of churches in the community exceeds the above ratio if at least one church per 1,000 people maintains this minimum standard of service and equipment.

3. Where, within the terms of this definition, an aided church is maintained in competition with a self-supporting church (i.e., a church which draws its current support exclusively from the given community), the latter, if it meets the minimum standards, shall be regarded as entitled to the field and the grant in aid to the competing church should be annually decreased looking to the complete cessation of aid at the end of three years.

4. Where no one of the churches in an over-churched community is self-supporting as above defined, the denominations concerned should confer at once to determine what church should be asked to undertake the responsibility of maintaining at least the



minimum standard of service and equipment in that community (except that if one of such aided churches now maintains the minimum standard it shall be regarded as entitled to the field, and aid should be withdrawn from the others as indicated under '3' above).

The following alternative methods of adjustment are generally recognized as applicable under these circumstances:

The unconditional withdrawal of one denomination in favor of the other, or

The withdrawal of both in favor of a third not now present, or the formation of a federated or community church.

5. No new enterprise should be initiated with missionary support in contravention of the above principles.

6. Mission aid for building purposes should not be given a competing church as above defined.

7. In the expenditure of missionary money in the Town and Country field the following objects should be regarded as of primary importance:

(a) As a first responsibility to build up the highest type of service standard for each church which now has or which is proposed to have the exclusive responsibility for a field. (For this purpose, the simplified Par Standard as worked out by the Committee on Town and Country is recommended.)

(b) To strengthen particularly for demonstration purposes, churches which face situations of unusual difficulty or unusual strategic importance.

(c) Adequately to occupy now unoccupied communities and to serve now unreached populations.

8. Where the work of a given church is to be discontinued, the policy should be definitely to dissolve its organization and unite its membership with other existing churches.

9. As a step on the way to complete co-operation, competition is held to be particularly unjustifiable if between churches belonging to the same one of the following recognized groups:

(1) Liturgical churches;

(2) Churches practicing the baptism of believers only;

(3) Churches of other denominations represented in these Councils.

(*Data Book*, North American Home Missions Congress, Vol. II, p. 43-4.)

## RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY CHURCH MOVEMENT

In 1928 also a co-operative arrangement between the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council was worked out involving a Joint Committee for the purpose of counselling and helping to direct the Community Church Movement, thus preventing "the possible development of a new denomination." The following principles were agreed upon by the Joint Committee of the national agencies and commended to the community churches:



## Declaration of Principles Intended to Be a Guide in the Uniting of Churches in Small Communities

In making church adjustments of one thousand population or less, the following principles should be recommended:

1. That the primacy of the community interests and the rights and affections of the small groups as well as of the larger should be recognized.

2. That where a single church organization results, it should be so formed and its affairs so conducted that, in all things local, it will work towards a single church consciousness, while, in its outside affiliations, it shall conserve such missionary objectives and fellowship interests as continue to enlist the affections of the membership.

3. That it will show sacred regard for the ceremonies, customs or sacraments through which the several groups have been wont to express themselves, making suitable arrangements for their continuance.

4. That its affiliations shall be such as, on the one hand, will not interfere with the development of a single church consciousness and a new community ideal, and, on the other, will keep it in touch with the going order of Christendom and in harmony with those ideals and convictions which through the generations have become contributions of world value. (*History of the Home Missions Council with Introductory Outline History of Home Missions*, by William R. King, p. 59.)

## NORTH AMERICAN HOME MISSIONS CONGRESS

Midway in the Five-Year Program the North American Home Missions Congress was held in Washington, D. C., in 1930 under the auspices of the Home Missions Councils and the Federal Council. The *Data Book* of the Congress in two volumes, embodying the results of two years of preliminary researches by three competent Commissions, remains one of the most compendious and stimulating statements of the general problems of co-operative Protestantism with special stress on comity. The Congress reaffirmed the "Comity Principles Applicable to English-speaking Work in the Town and Country Fields" as previously adopted by the Home Missions Councils, but asked in addition for the development of "similar sets of principles adapted to other types of situations," and urged "that we now pass from the resolution stage to the action stage." This decision was reiterated in instructions given the Committee now reporting.

## THE DEPRESSION

The effect of the depression following 1929 was to delay many of the processes of the proposed Five-Year Program and to block some of its objectives. A final registration of comity ideas and sentiments as they had culminated in this period was however expressed in the elaborate report of the Joint Committee published under the title *Home Missions Today and Tomorrow: a Review and Forecast* (Home Missions Council, 1934: 419 pp).



Its most conspicuous practical outcome was the development of the Master List Agreement, adhered to by leading denominations, which listed and repeatedly considered, state by state, all rural communities in which any two of the participating denominations were aiding churches by grants from national missionary funds, with a view to ending competition. The denominations now party to the Master List agreement are the Northern Baptist; Congregational-Christian; Disciples of Christ; Methodist (representing the merger of three bodies); Presbyterian in the U. S. A. and Reformed Church in the U. S. (now including by merger the Evangelical Synod). These are responsible for about fifty per cent of the total expenditures upon home missionary enterprises in the United States and involve about 13,000 separate enterprises. The agreement has been applied for the most part to communities of 1,500 population and under. Up to 1940, the processes initiated under the Master List plan had effected the withdrawal (in twenty-two states) of \$72,400 out of a total aid by national boards of \$450,260, and a withdrawal of \$19,526 of state aid in fifteen states out of a total aid of \$91,926. Aid had been withdrawn in a total of 483 places in twenty-two states. (For text of the Master List agreement see p. 56.)

### WITHIN TOMORROW

We are now within the opening years of that "tomorrow" which the report of the Joint Committee forecast in 1934. It is generally agreed that the effect of the continued depression was a setback to the cause of comity. With the slowing down of population growth and its recession from urban communities, the situation appeared to be more static and many fewer comity cases were recognized and dealt with than in the previous period.

At the same time the co-operative movement was notably broadening by the inclusion of agencies expressive of less comprehensive forms of co-operation than had been thought normal by the earlier Councils of Churches. For example, numerous new Councils were formed by combinations with Councils of Religious Education which had not previously had to do with and perhaps did not fully understand the comity tradition. Comity accordingly has come to have somewhat smaller stress in the total co-operative situation than it had in the earlier decades.

Finally a conviction has been reached that the old era of co-operation has about reached its limits on the level on which it had been most largely proceeding, namely, that of agreement among national agencies. It is now seen that the main problem is to convince and bring to the point of action the subordinate units of the several denominations so that comity principles may be made to apply to the tens of thousands of self-supporting churches—self-supporting only in the sense that they are able to pay their own bills because operated on a substandard level. If comity is to have a rebirth, it must permeate the hardpan of the smaller units and break through the inertia or opposition of the minor leaders of the churches. (See *Home Missions Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 332-333.)

### THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION

The years of partial economic recovery preceding the present world war saw a renewal of interest in co-operation in home missions and in comity



problems. An overture of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., to the Federal Council renewed the impulse toward larger unity in home mission work. This led to a joint session of the Executive Committees of the Federal Council of Churches and the Home Missions Council of North America and to the appointment of the Committee now reporting. (See Introduction, p. 7.) But the whole Report regards itself as more than an episode of history. It is a summons to the church to respond to the instant need of things as well as to re-orient its life in more loyal correspondence to its permanent and eternal principles.



## II. CURRENT FORMULATIONS OF COMITY PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES BY LOCAL AND STATE COUNCILS OF CHURCHES AND CO-OPERATING DENOMINATIONS

THE Joint Committee to Restudy Comity of the Federal Council of Churches and the Home Missions Council of North America, on May 19, 1941, instructed its Secretaries "to collate materials on comity including current comity agreements, with reference to the development of more radical principles." Acting under these instructions, the Secretaries present this second section of the Report.

Its materials have been gathered in three ways: First, a questionnaire asking five questions was circulated to Councils of Churches and denominational officials, and was answered by fourteen city organizations, ten state organizations, and seven denominations. The questions were:

1. Is your organization working under a formally adopted comity agreement?
2. What was the date of adoption?
3. What are the main provisions?
4. What recent or current comity problems has your organization confronted?
5. What suggestions can you offer the committee in connection with its restudy of comity principles and procedures so that they may apply more precisely to all types of churches and all types of communities?

Accompanying the return of the questionnaires supplemental printed material was in most cases furnished. The organizing and digesting of this material constituted a second phase of the study. This supplemental material naturally did not afford a precise and sifted body of data and complete detailed interpretation has proved impossible within the time so far available to the study. However, the main points of the data are identified and interpreted below.

Printed background materials, including the record of the more important comity findings of the Home Missions Council and other gatherings sponsored by the two Councils, have been in mind in connection with the interpretation. These have been summarized in the preceding section of this Report.

### SUMMARY OF CURRENT COMITY AGREEMENTS

#### FREQUENCY OF AGREEMENTS

Of fourteen City Councils of Churches answering on this point, nine say they have agreements, one additional says "yes" but nominally only; another that a state-wide committee of denominational superintendents acts for the local Council in comity matters; while four of them, in border or southern cities, say that they have no agreements.



Of ten state organizations, eight say that they have comity agreements; one, a southern state, says that it has none; while the tenth, a state under voluntary Council leadership (New Jersey), says "no" but that a recently organized state superintendent's Council has begun to function in the field of comity.

Of seven denominations replying, four say that they are party to the Master List agreement to withdraw home mission aid through national funds from competitive fields, and one that comity is a recognized tradition though there is no governing agreement about it. One small group (the Friends) reply that the infrequent extension of their churches has rarely raised comity problems. A southern denomination says that it participates in regional understandings as to work with special populations, but has no general agreement. It adds that it finds comity is "no problem."

### CURRENT STATUS OF THE PRACTICE OF COMITY

Is comity an ancient tradition of remote origin, a hang-over from the past? Or have its ideals been recently reaffirmed by revisions of statements or otherwise?

Of the nine cities which say that they have comity agreements, six have recently revised them—five of them since 1940. The sixth revision is undated but is obviously fairly recent. Where no recent restatement or revision has occurred, it is explained that there has been little business in the comity field during the depression, especially in cities whose populations are stationary or declining. Two cities, however, record the virtual lapsing of the practice of comity and one records a current refusal to reaffirm the old comity statement. This refusal, however, was accompanied by a thoroughly serious attempt to rethink the whole matter and was accompanied by a resolution affirming the purpose to act on comity principles until a satisfactory new statement could be arrived at.

In this case and two others, a change of name was suggested in order to dispense with the term "comity" which is said to have unfortunate associations and is now regarded as a liability. In four cases it was said that comity was not worth reviving on the old basis. What those taking this viewpoint want is to substitute the positive and comprehensive practice of co-operative planning for piecemeal comity which is sometimes defined as a method of preventing churches from doing what they want to do.

These revisions, suggested changes, and modifications of mood indicate that here is a field of contemporary concern and development. Departments, commissions or committees on comity are among the most frequent subdivisions of Councils of Churches. The present study shows that its practice is not a mere traditional carry-over but something which is being challenged to restatement and readoption. On the other hand, as the evidence has shown, the practice is not universal and some of the reaffirmations appear to be a bit weak-kneed.

The evidence of the responses from state Councils is to the same general effect as that from the cities. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Ohio are conspicuous among the states for long histories of marked activity in the comity field. Massachusetts and Ohio have recently reformulated their positions. The newer Councils, except in the South, have invariably included comity as a department.



No general agreements are reported by the denominations outside of the Master List agreement of 1935, except as to special fields (work for Indians, migrants, etc). But the majority of denominations whose mission Boards are associated in the Home Missions Council are operating more or less consciously under the normative actions set forth in the previous section. (As to the need of further commitments and enabling action, see p. 7.)

(Since the questionnaires were circulated, an important strengthening and implementing action with respect to comity in the intermountain area was taken by the Intermountain Conference of Evangelical Churches in Salt Lake City in February, 1942.)

It should be added that the general recent growth of the movement of organized co-operation, represented by some dozens of new Councils, state and local, is in itself an expression of the widening scope of comity, since the comity tradition is so bound up with the Council tradition that most of the new Councils immediately undertake comity functions.

## PROVISIONS OF COMITY AGREEMENTS

The question as to the content of comity agreements, as already indicated, was generally answered by the enclosure of a printed statement covering the wide variety of matters which have been included under the general idea. A systematic condensed account of these statements is attempted in the following paragraphs.

### 1. *Philosophy and Sanctions*

Comity statements in the main do not contain any specific rationalization (such as that contained in Dr. Morse's *Foreword* to this Report) explaining the idea and its sanctions. The philosophy of comity is assumed or is included in statements of the general philosophy of co-operation as practiced by the Councils and expressed in all their departments. In their most general aspects, the sanctions of co-operation are of two sorts; pragmatic and idealistic. The churches co-operate because it is more sensible and effective to do so, but also because they feel the obligations of Christian brotherhood and desire to express the essential unity of the Christian Church. A few statements point out the special obligation to Christian brotherhood in the organization and location of churches with respect to one another, and an occasional statement is found to the effect that the welfare of communities ranks above denominational interests in this matter.

Certain important statements and revisions of comity agreements, however, have been drafted separately rather than in connection with general basic declarations about Christian co-operation. These have been more apt to elaborate upon the Christian motive in its application to this particular field. Increasingly the ecumenical note is sounded. Thus Cincinnati, in the revised statement of 1941, includes among the aims of comity the following: "to remove the scandal of a divided Protestantism, to recognize an essential unity of faith and purpose among us while acknowledging a diversity of experience and polity."

All told however, the explicit evidence of these statements is rather slender as to the philosophy and sanctions of comity. They are not often elaborated in this specific context.



## 2. *Practical Objectives*

In contrast with inarticulateness as to its theoretical sanctions the practical objectives to comity are very well documented. A classic statement handed down from an untraced origin appears in the comity statements of numerous Councils in slightly different phraseology. As rephrased by Cleveland (1942): "(1) Every community is entitled to the spiritual ministry of a Christian church. (2) Every church is entitled to a parish of sufficient potential resources to justify reasonable investment in a program and material equipment." Statements as to the quality of the ministries which comity seeks to secure generally belong to a more evolved stage of its practice. Earlier statements simply called for a church for every community and an opportunity for each church (through freedom from competition) to become a good church.

More recent statements as to practical objectives begin to talk of the joint planning and occasionally of co-ordination in behalf of these more specific objectives.

## 3. *Scope*

Lists of matters with which comity in cities is concerned generally specify the location, relocation, or radical changes of programs of churches, Sunday schools, or missions, including the taking of options on or purchase of property. Chicago's article on this point is more elaborate than the average but well summarizes the more common points recognized as at issue in the following terms:

In order to realize the purpose of the Comity Commission the following principles regarding the location and distribution of churches and other Christian institutions are hereby agreed upon:

1. Any denomination, local church, local group or individual wishing to start new work in any field shall present a request in writing to the Comity Commission through the Fields Committee before any decisive action establishing work, such as starting a Sunday School or other service of worship, renting a meeting place or purchasing property, shall have been taken, and shall await the action of the Commission before proceeding. However, it shall not be considered an infraction of the Rules if a denomination, thinking of occupying a certain territory, shall obtain an option on a lot or lots; but the securing of such option shall not be considered as giving this denomination a prior claim upon the territory. Any church wishing to change its location within its community or to alter radically the character of its program of service, such as providing for work for other racial or language groups than those theretofore served, shall present its request to the Comity Commission in the same manner as is provided above for those wishing to begin new work.

In cases wherein any denomination has occupied a certain field or location and has carried on work therein, and thereafter has abandoned such field or location to the extent of having wholly ceased to hold services and carry on work therein, and later shall desire to re-occupy said field or location, such denomination shall present a request in the same form and manner as though it related to a new field. Such a request or any other request presented for the occupancy of such a field shall be considered as though relating



to the entry into the field for the first time to start a "new work." But due regard shall be given to all the facts relative to previous occupancy.

2. Churches shall be located with reference to each other and their respective communities so as to afford each one a reasonable parish opportunity and responsibility.

3. In communities where there is a natural center to which lines of travel converge approval may be given to locate churches with reference to such centers, but they shall be so distributed as to prevent as far as possible overlapping in the discharge of immediate parish responsibilities and to avoid the impression that they are rival or competing institutions.

4. In residential communities where converging lines are not so marked the number of churches shall be determined by the density of the population and their location in accordance with the principles set forth in paragraph (2).

5. In communities where foreign-speaking peoples are found in large numbers or where economic and social conditions make it apparent that independent self-sustaining churches are not possible, the number and character of churches and similar institutions shall be determined after careful survey and in the light of manifest needs.

6. In the application of principles stated in paragraphs 2 and 5 account shall be taken of the presence in communities of churches not in co-operation with the Federation.

7. Approvals given under the principles and rules herein set forth shall be effective only until the annual review following the action of the Commission with reference to the same.

8. If at any time in the judgment of any member of the Commission the communion to which a task has been assigned is not adequately meeting the need, the entire matter may be called up for review by the Commission.

(From "Principles and Rules of the Comity Commission of the Chicago Church Federation," in force January, 1941.)

Comity statements of state Councils indicate a similar scope but generally imply a wider range of solutions to comity problems than the city statements do. These typically include (a) establishment of larger parishes, (b) locally federated churches, and (c) the exchange of fields between denominations.

The few denominational agreements cited are substantially limited to methods of granting or withdrawal of subsidies. (Numerous normative actions of the Home Missions Council accepted by its member Boards but not strictly analogous to the formal agreements of the city and state Councils, are reported upon in a previous connection.)

#### 4. Machinery

Departments, Commissions, or Committees on Comity are generally made up with reference to balanced denominational representation. This is generally true of all departments of Councils and Federations. But the fact that the organization and location or removal of churches is *more specifically an ecclesiastical matter than most of the functions of Councils of Churches*, has led to rather extreme and deliberate differences of practice in the organization



of comity committees. These differences are rather clearly based upon theoretical grounds.

With certain Councils the denominational superintendents and church extension executives ex officio make up the primary or exclusive membership of the comity committee. The theory is that the denominations have lodged permanent authority for comity matters in such officers and that the Councils' machinery should register this fact.

A contrasting theory and practice deliberately makes the membership of denominational officials incidental within a larger committee. Laymen and pastors then constitute a large majority. St. Louis, for example, requires a lay chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary of its comity committee. The purpose not to let the matter lie primarily in the hands of paid executives is evident in the specifications for the make-up of committees in other places.

A third typical arrangement, characteristic of smaller cities where denominational executives are rarely resident, is to constitute the committee from equal numbers of representatives from the participating denominations including resident local denominational executives if any. This arrangement is simply a reflection of the local situation and not a purposeful plan either to lodge responsibility with paid executives or to see that it is preponderantly in the hands of laymen and pastors.

The differences just indicated are partly historical. In numerous cases, Superintendent's Councils were functioning in the comity field before comity was taken over by Councils of Churches; and in these cases it was natural to continue paid officials as the core of the new machinery. On the other hand the desire to bring the lay mind to bear upon the problem, to secure greater detachment than paid officials are presumed to have, and to achieve a more consistently community outlook, has sometimes led to the submergence of paid officials in larger committees.

#### 5. *Procedures*

The typical comity agreement is likely to indicate a fairly complete set of steps to be followed in the consideration of cases. Generalized, these include:

(1) The *proposal* by any denomination to organize a new church or to move, or radically change the program of, an old one, is referred to the comity committee for consideration. This generally applies to Sunday schools and missions as well as to churches.

(2) All *parties concerned* are notified of the proposal.

(3) A prompt *investigation* is made by the comity committee, frequently through a special committee.

(4) Generally an *objective survey* of the field is required though sometimes this is provided only in cases of controversy.

(5) If the parties at interest request it a *hearing* is held.

(6) After investigation with or without formal survey and hearing the comity committee renders its *decision*.

(7) The *decision* is communicated to the parties at interest.

(8) It is *generally accepted*.

It is only fair to add that a study of 345 comity cases considered by city comity committees revealed that, in cases of acute conflict, a good many of the committees' findings were virtually forced decisions not reflecting their real judgments. On the other hand the great majority of cases actually



involved only mild conflicts and the findings were apparently in most cases accepted. (See Douglass, *Church Comity*, Doubleday-Doran, 1929, pp. 5 and 6.)

The long experience of several state Councils with comity has chiefly concerned rural situations. They have generally adopted the Home Missions Councils' "Comity Principles Applicable to English-speaking Work in Town and Country Fields," (see p. 22), and their statements commonly record a much greater variety of circumstances and situations with which comity is concerned than those that have arisen in any particular city or under urban circumstances. The Pennsylvania Council of Churches, for example, records many scores of comity cases under six types of adjustment:

- (1) *Allocations* of territory to particular denominations.
- (2) *Combination* of churches into denominational affiliated or federated local congregations or into larger parishes or by organic unions of churches of the same or different denominations.
- (3) *Eliminations*; that is to say the discontinuation of local churches "for the best interests of the Kingdom."
- (4) *Preventions*: cases of keeping churches from being organized in communities where they are not needed.
- (5) *Re-locations*, particularly in the neighborhood of cities.
- (6) *Community churches*, preferably denominational.

The more elaborate statements of state Councils rehearse the advantages of these or similar alternatives and indicate the circumstances under which they are desirable. There is a growing tendency to provide for the initiative by comity committees in making suggestions for the better churching of local communities, on the basis of surveys but in advance of the bringing of particular cases to the attention of the comity committee.

## 6. *The Criteria*

The criteria used in determining the adequacy of religious occupancy and ministries in a community and the presence or absence of competition in particular communities, include a variety of factors. Specifications for urban and rural situations incline to differ considerably. In general the urban formulae envisage the organization of new churches while the rural formulae have primarily in mind the adjustment of old competitive situations.

In the statements of the city Councils the formula "one strong church in each natural parish" is typical. When it comes to defining the natural parish, measurements of distance are most frequently employed, e.g., "one-half mile from any existing church." Chicago, in the document already quoted, elaborates the statement of criteria (especially in paragraphs 3 to 6) by the recognition of the structure of cities, and the factor of density of population as determining whether or not neighboring churches should be regarded as competitive; and several of the more highly developed statements of other Councils are similar.

When an opportunity for a new church has been demonstrated it is frequently specified that the preferences of the people of the community should largely determine what denomination should enter the field.

Another frequent requirement is that in the assignment of fields room must be found for the smaller denominations which would rarely if ever constitute a majority in any given community.



The rural statements of criteria are on the whole more specific than those originating with city Councils since in the main they follow formulae adopted by the Home Missions Council for general use in the rural church field. The origins of these standards are traced and their contents analyzed in the preceding section of this Report.

The most general article of the rural agreements specifies as a norm, "one church for each 1,000 rural population homogeneous as to language and color and reasonably accessible," served by a full-time resident pastor, with worship every Sunday, a regular Sunday school, and a reasonably adequate building.

Numerous Councils, both city and state, have never promulgated specific lists of criteria for proper churching but have left each case to be considered in the light of whatever aspects or problems are raised by the parties at interest or are thought pertinent at the moment.

#### 7. *Participating Denominations*

As previous studies of City Councils of Churches have shown (Douglass, *Protestant Co-operation in American Cities*, Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1930, pp. 92-3), the characteristic form of the attachment of denominational churches to them is as follows: a *substantial number* from a substantial core of the denominations of the community *participate in piecemeal fashion* as their own interests dictate. This general habit is also followed in the field of comity but with certain interesting variations. In the effort to regularize the situation and to define denominations which are "with" or "without" comity agreements, certain Councils have provided that denominations may share in survey and inquiry processes and may even have the benefit of assignments of fields, without themselves having agreed to be bound by comity principles or agreements. It is felt that the reasonableness of the facts as ascertained will control most specific decisions and that the educational effect, even of partial participation, will tend in the long run to bring outsiders into line. With Councils which have developed only nebulous procedures and criteria, and which are virtually operating on a case by case basis, all denominations are obviously in the same theoretical category. Some of them are likely to co-operate and concur in a given case while others are not.

#### 8. *Means of Securing Acceptance of Results*

What makes any denomination *ever* accept decisions resulting from comity processes? An outright agreement in advance to do so is rather rare. Still rarer is any special ratifying action of comity agreements by the ecclesiastical bodies as such. In initiating comity procedures a committee sometimes declares, "We bind ourselves—" but obviously this cannot bind its successors. Sometimes it is recorded that the Council practicing comity consists of *representatives* of denominations, and that consequently its *decisions ought to be understood to pledge the denominations*. Sometimes it is sought to add force to the decisions of a comity committee by requiring a three-fourths majority to adopt it. In one case, that of Cleveland, it is provided that "when action of the Comity Committee is not acceptable to one of the interested parties, appeal may be made to a Committee of Reference consisting of three judicially-minded laymen. These laymen shall be selected from a panel of seven elected by the Comity Committee annually. Decisions of this Committee of Reference shall be final."



In the large, however, the authority of comity decisions rests on the fact that a considerable group of co-operating denominations have actually found it possible generally to accept them over a period of years. On some such unexpressed sanction in which reason and loyalty are mixed, most of the decisions hitherto reached have been made. In the main they have not been based on the fact that denominations have specifically agreed always to accept the decisions reached. In short, their *authority is one of established habit based on co-operative experience rather than on legal enactment.*

## SPECIAL PROBLEMS AND RECENT EMPHASES

While the replies as to their comity practices were coming in from the Councils of Churches the war emergency was gathering and deepening. Naturally the most frequently mentioned novel problems relate to this emergency. (This phase of the report is covered in the next section on "Seven Typical Church Situations and Their Meaning for Co-operative Churchmanship," pp. 37-55.)

Other special problems frequently enough mentioned to be regarded as typical are: (1) The problem of churches of foreign-speaking populations with which competition is regarded as especially inexcusable. (2) In the rural field the difficulty presented by the circuit system is repeatedly mentioned. Competition cannot be cleared up in a given community A because one or more of the competitive ministers also serve communities B and C, thus involving a chain of cases. (3) Minimum salary provisions are sometimes said to add to the persistence of substandard churches. The wholly meritorious conviction that every minister should have a living salary is confused with the fallacious supposition that the continuance of every existing church is justified. (4) So-called self-supporting churches on the substandard level are called the hardest to bring to the acceptance of comity principles. (5) The problem of supervision of federated churches is noted as presenting special difficulties. (6) Another difficult problem is that of finding places for smaller denominations under ordinary comity criteria. (7) It is pointed out that areas in which population is declining offer very different problems for comity than those in which population is growing. (8) The problem of local autonomy is repeatedly pointed out. Even under the strongest denominational policies the superior units do not legislate completely for the subordinate units. Thus with respect to the only really comprehensive attempt on the part of a denomination to enjoin the practice of comity on its subordinate units (that of the Presbyterian, U. S. A., General Assembly, 1913), Dr. Hermann N. Morse writes, "In form this action is an *instruction* to the Board of National Missions but . . . it is *only a strong recommendation* to the Synods and Presbyteries which administer their own National Missions work." (For text of the General Assembly action see Appendix, p. 67.) Dr. Morse adds, "You will see the importance of an additional process to create support for any such bond of co-operation."

### *Community Churches*

The relationships of denominations practicing comity to non-denominational community churches constitute a continuous story to which additional installments are still being written. The issue appears both from the standpoint of joint planning and of choosing methods of adjusting competitive



situations. (For the history of this issue see p. 23.) Shall non-denominational churches ever be deliberately planned and shall they ever be utilized as means of preventing over-churching?

Numerous current statements both by city and state Councils explicitly discourage the non-denominational, independent or union church; and when nothing is said about the matter, it is obviously generally assumed that comity measures will ordinarily result in the establishment of denominational churches. The issue, however, has proved so recurrent and so insistent that important Councils have come to make explicit provision for non-denominational churches under temporary or exceptional circumstances. Thus the revised Cleveland principles (1942) state: "Whenever the Comity Committee finds sentiment in a community strongly in favor of the organization of a community church the Committee may designate one of the denominations to carry forward the work in the name of the Comity Committee until such time as the enterprise is ready to become a denominational church." Similarly Cincinnati (1941) sets forth among the aims of the Comity Committee the following: "to survey new communities and to plan the strategic location therein of a limited number of non-competing churches which shall be sponsored jointly or by single denominations as recommended by the Committee." Chicago also makes provision for community churches as exceptions and has issued a series of thoughtful statements as the result of its long experience. (See Appendix, p. 60.) Baltimore on the contrary in its latest formulations (1942) deliberately denies Council sanction to interdenominational churches even temporarily. (For further discussion, see p. 51.)

### SUGGESTIONS TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

Constructive suggestions for the benefit of the Joint Committee were invited from those responding to the comity questionnaire. The resulting replies were rather thin and scattering, and showed little common trend.

It was urged, for example, that the Committee try to find means for getting more definite commitments to comity on the part of the denominations and to get more denominations—including the newer ones—to accept comity practices.

On the other hand it was urged that emphasis in the field of comity should be shifted from the attempt to control by rules to constructive engineering on the basis of large-scale positive planning.

Of specific recommendations, greater stress on larger parishes was somewhat urgently recommended.

A rather incidental detail was pointedly mentioned in one or two responses, namely, that in surveys to determine the assignment of territory to denominations the work be done by representatives of denominations which are not involved. (One might question whether this would not result merely in the denominations concerned being out-voted, whereas if they were party to the survey process they might be educated and convinced.)

All told the effort to get constructive suggestions by means of the questionnaire was not highly successful.

However, in conclusion it may be affirmed that the results of the questionnaire as a whole, as embodied in this summary, show that the practice of comity is based on a rather solid and coherent body of established habit, with considerable contrast in its applications as between urban and rural situations.



### III. SEVEN TYPICAL CHURCH SITUATIONS AND THEIR MEANING FOR CO-OPERATIVE CHURCHMANSHIP

THIS section of the Report is offered in partial fulfillment of the instructions of the Joint Committee to its Secretaries to collate materials on the basis of field studies. Its purpose is—

- (1) to describe typical situations revealed by the field studies, that is to say, widespread and frequent situations;
- (2) to analyze their essential factors;
- (3) to propose provisional principles of action bearing upon co-operative churchmanship; and
- (4) to suggest tentative means of implementing the principles suggested.

An outline of the itinerary and method of the field studies has been presented in the Introduction (p. 7).

The seven points of this Report on the results of the field studies obviously do not exhaust the situations and issues with which comity is concerned. They merely indicate some of the most easily distinguishable and manageable aspects, leaving the more subtle and difficult ones for further study and analysis than the limits of this Report permit. Among the subjects on which the Committee wishes it could have thrown light objectively are the bearing on comity practices of divergent doctrines of the church, and the relationship of the whole co-operative movement to the newer emotional sects.

#### I. NEW EMERGENCY SITUATIONS FREQUENTLY OF A TEMPORARY CHARACTER

Some of the most immediately challenging demands on co-operative churchmanship are furnished by the new communities adjacent to war camps and defense industries. Many of these communities require the erection of entirely new housing on hitherto open land. But the majority are attached, as extensions and satellites, to existing communities and to their major industrial and transportation resources. However, the magnitude of the new populations brought in in response to these developments frequently serves to revolutionize an old community to such a degree that its situation becomes almost as radically changed as though it were a new one. In either case the socially constructive forces—the churches along with them—are often highly unprepared to meet the new situation, with its emergency demands on every side coupled with an exceedingly uncertain future.

##### *Cases Studied*

Illustrations of such new emergency situations directly investigated during the field work of the committee are: (1) Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and vicinity; (2) the Seattle-Tacoma region including Bremerton, Washington, the seat of one of the chief Pacific Coast Navy Yards; (3) the Armistead Gardens and Middle River developments adjacent to the Martin Bomber works on the edge of Baltimore; (4) the Harboro, Chester, and Bris-



tol neighborhoods within the Philadelphia defense area, and Portland and Bath, Maine; also several New Jersey communities. (5) The evacuation of Japanese from their homes in all the western coastal areas, their concentration in reception centers and their slow distribution to resettlement areas, presented for study another striking and unprecedented set of emergency situations of temporary character.

#### *Common Elements*

The significant common elements in those and scores of other similar situations are:

1. The majority of these emergency communities will not be permanent at least in their present form and functions. Production on the gigantic war scale will be over. A considerable portion of the new war emergency housing—90 per cent of future construction, according to a statement by the head of the National Housing Authority, July, 1942—is temporary and “dismountable” and will ultimately be removed; and, generally, there is great doubt as to the normal future demands either for the housing or the industrial facilities now being created. This makes the initiation of religious enterprises in these communities exceedingly risky from the standpoint of denominational investments.

2. With so uncertain a future religious enterprises in many such situations cannot be self-supporting to any normal degree. They are inherently missionary projects, concerned with extending ministries to persons rather than with building institutions.

3. The human and religious needs which the new communities gather up and present are extraordinarily exigent. Lack of normal community organization with its incentives and restraints, often coupled with congestion of housing facilities and lack of school, sanitary, and recreational facilities, creates crying problems.

#### *Working Principles*

On the basis of established habits of co-operative planning and the experience in comity represented in the organizations and understandings of national co-operative agencies and local Councils of Churches, it ought to be possible to formulate working principles of action immediately applicable to such situations. The following are suggested for consideration and discussion:

In new war camp and defense industry communities (and in the Japanese evacuation centers)—

1. Whatever is done religiously should be done after co-operative planning and on behalf of the entire body of churches.

2. Ordinarily the execution of given projects should be assigned to particular denominations, after an understanding as to the character and guarantee as to the adequacy of the work to be undertaken both as to personnel and facilities.

3. Every co-operative undertaking in emergency communities should be pledged to manifest genuine community character and ecumenical quality in religious ministries. (Suggestions for securing this, applicable to temporary communities, will follow in the next section.)

4. Where local churches are adequately organized for co-operative work through Councils of Churches, expect these agencies to act. Otherwise expect state or national co-operative agencies to set up under their auspices necessary local co-operative machinery to meet the situation.



5. Where desirable employ pastoral workers on the direct authority of Councils of Churches in advance of any organization, in order that instant needs of families and individuals may be met.

6. If judged desirable in special cases, give churches organized in temporary communities the status of interdenominational community churches, in line with actions of the Cleveland, Chicago and Cincinnati Church Federations. (See, however, the Baltimore opposition to this view, p. 62.)

7. Where ministerial associations exist but not Councils of Churches, ask such associations to take on functions of co-operative planning in communication with the existing interchurch agencies, state and national.

8. By far the greatest part of the populations engaged in defense industries will not live in new or segregated communities but will be scattered among existing populations in old communities, especially in the major cities. These diffused populations will be most effectively served through the augmented programs of existing churches. Co-operative planning to this end should be immediately undertaken in all communities affected and additions to staff or equipment should not be made simply with view to the competitive advantage of single congregations.

#### *Implementation*

1. As a first step toward the implementation of these principles, the Home Missions Council and the Co-ordinating Committee for War-Time Services in all of their field relations should be asked to adopt and act on them.

2. State and city Councils of Churches should give specific attention to the problem and provide for emergency larger parishes or similar agencies for implementing these principles within the framework of their existing co-operative organization.

3. When denominations create special machinery to dispense war-emergency funds apart from their regular missionary agencies, these new agencies should be instructed scrupulously to observe the comity principles to which the regular agencies have long given allegiance.

## II. EMERGENCY ADJUSTMENTS OF OLD SITUATIONS

### *Emerging Difficulties*

As the nation's war economy moves into its more exigent phase it will exert increasing pressure on every aspect of our lives. Situations met in the field and within the knowledge of all, already forecast the necessity of widespread adjustments of old situations to meet the emergency.

In the religious field one finds a growing anxiety over the prospective shortage of ministers due to the involvement of so many in war service, great concern as to the size of the next entering classes of theological seminaries and anticipation of the necessity of doubling up congregations on account of limitation of transportation and possible shortage of fuel during the coming winter. Individual churches are already known to be employing buses for bringing their people to church and administrators are finding increased difficulty in maintaining leadership in those churches which are hardest to provide for at best. Superannuated ministers are being recalled to service.

In a communication to his denominational publication a minister in a small town bewails the loss to defense communities of five families and four individuals in six weeks. "How long," he asks, "can this little parish stand



these losses? Apparently there is to be no limit to the drain of the membership?" He goes on to say that salaries will necessarily be reduced and ministers themselves gravitate to areas of greater population. He concludes, "Those who remain in the rural parishes and missions are likely to be the forgotten men of this war." This minister's solution is for some "great" city church to adopt his dwindling parish for the duration. It does not occur to him to combine temporarily with his Christian neighbors of another denomination. But is not this the most obvious and natural emergency adjustment? Such situations are almost sure to multiply greatly and grow in intensity.

#### *Common Elements*

The common elements in this group of situations are:

1. That hitherto separate people and organizations are being thrown together through the deprivations and curtailments of war.

2. Some tendency toward the spiritual integration of communities—a keener sense of the solidarity of all classes and greater sympathy for each other under the common burden and strain—can probably be anticipated. So far as this actually comes it would be unparalleled tragedy for the church not to match it with increasing unity of feeling and action.

3. But such adjustments as are made between religious bodies under emergency pressure are more likely to follow the rule of expediency, just because they arise out of external pressures rather than in inner incentives and convictions.

4. We ought to try to make the things that happen to us fall out to the furtherance of the Gospel. The providential throwing of Christians together in local congregations, as well as in total community outlook, ought to afford opportunity for genuine gains in Christian experience and values.

#### *Working Principles*

What principles of co-operative action can be formulated in the light of these widespread necessary adjustments of old situations which are immediately in prospect?

1. Surely an adequate and thoughtful provision should be made for respecting the variety of usages represented by congregations which may be temporarily thrown together for worship. In the case of permanent federations of congregations the official action of the Home Missions Council and Federal Council calls for "a sacred regard for the ceremonies, customs and sacraments through which the several groups have been wont to express themselves." There is equal need of this in cases of temporary unions of congregations. For example, a Disciples congregation within a temporarily united church should be encouraged to perpetuate its weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Provision should be made that an Episcopal group have the ministrations of a minister of their own church for the periodic celebration of the Holy Communion. Every effort should be made to avoid wounding the religious susceptibilities of any of the co-operating groups.

2. Even more important is it that a constructively educative and spiritually fruitful use be made of the experience of necessary temporary co-operation. Ought there not also always be a definite attempt to achieve a permanent enrichment of all by bringing into the common experience the distinctive values held by the several churches in separation; so that a more genuinely ecumenical mind should be achieved and a permanently more



appreciative and warm-hearted attitude established toward brethren in other communions?

#### *Implementations*

Is it too early for the national co-operative agencies, as well as the headquarters of the respective denominations, to anticipate the need of a multitude of such community adjustments before the war is over and to indicate, through suitable literature, the conditions and the attitudes under which they ought to be carried out?

### III. SITUATIONS STABILIZED ON SUBSTANDARD LEVELS

The overchurching of rural America is a familiar theme. It involves thousands of situations which, in reason and in Christian wisdom, have long called for adjustment.

Here are situations in seeming contrast with the dramatic emergencies previously considered. But, though confronted by no obvious crisis, tens of thousands of churches in the open country and in small communities are being profoundly affected by the drafting off of the most energetic part of the population for military service and war industries, with the corresponding weakening of all local institutions. Situations which have long called for permanent adjustment now doubly face the need of it, but are all the more likely to be neglected because of the more obvious challenge of the urban and defense-industry centers.

#### *Cases Studied*

Field contact with situations of this sort was had primarily in Hunterdon County, N. J. and Tioga County, N. Y., where limited but comprehensive surveys of the entire body of churches were made. In both counties every incorporated rural community was found to be over-churched, many of them flagrantly so, according to any established norm. Relative to population none of the larger towns or small cities had nearly so many churches as the open country. In the extreme case only two or three hundred people and in the average case between four and five hundred people were available to support a church. At the worst forty-three Methodist families, sixteen Lutheran families, twelve Lutheran families in a second church and twelve Presbyterian families were trying to maintain separate churches in the same community. In neither case did all of the families even of these diminutive groups pull together. Some of them went off to other communities for church ties or kept memberships in churches elsewhere.

Similar conditions, less adequately studied, were identified within the rural fringes of the Philadelphia and Seattle metropolitan areas.

The measurement of over-churching in these counties was arrived at by a process of carefully distributing the total population, both rural and town, among the total number of churches; subtracting the constituencies of Catholic, Jewish and Negro churches and the emotional sects; and thus arriving at a fairly accurate account of the population reasonably available to each church in each community or open country neighborhood.

No such extreme situation as is represented by these facts could prevail without eliciting some local efforts toward a remedy. In the case of Hunterdon County active movements were underway to overcome some of the difficulties of over-churching by combinations of existing churches in the larger parishes,



without, however, reducing the actual number of the churches. In Tioga County the example of extensive and highly successful school consolidation had challenged the communities to consider the consolidation of churches, with the result that one recent federation had taken place, and a notable community Sunday school and other promising forms of local co-operation had developed. In the main, however, the situation in both counties continued on a general substandard level.

The numerical extent of substandard churching has never been actually measured. Competent samples show, however, that it is general throughout the United States. (See *Data Book*, North American Home Missions Congress, 1930, Vol. II, p. 33; *Home Missions Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 69-74.) It relates in the main to so-called self-supporting churches which are self-supporting only because they exist on a substandard level. The withdrawal of national home mission aid from such competitive fields under the "Master List" plan has helped, as has the stimulation of better rural church standards fostered by State Councils of Churches and other inter-church agencies. But in one of the counties surveyed a case was discovered in which the state authorities of a denomination had withdrawn a subsidy from a weak competitive church in a community of 1200 only to have the subsidy restored by the smaller local unit of the same denomination which brought in a superannuated minister living on a pension. The simple fact is that substandard conditions have become the habit of multitudes of people who accept them as normal and will not rise above them without re-education under strong incentive and leadership. There is then the acute need of implementing the fifth finding of the joint session of the Home Missions and Federal Councils on March 14, 1941, calling on the denominations "to enjoin and empower all lesser ecclesiastical jurisdictions and all denominational officials fully to co-operate . . . in the furtherance of the principles of comity and co-operation authorized by their respective bodies." (See Introduction, p. 7 and Appendix, p. 68.)

#### *Common Elements*

Without resorting to further statistical documentation it is possible to enumerate the characteristic common elements of these substandard situations so that they will be recognizable by all.

1. It is characteristic of the substandard churches that they are generally small.
2. Great numbers of them are declining in membership and effectiveness and promise nothing except to be worse.
3. They require and get very disproportionate amounts of missionary aid.
4. They have thin programs.
5. They pay substandard salaries, that is to say, salaries which all the ideals and frequently the enactments of the respective denominations repudiate. (In a recently surveyed group of sixty churches covering highly desirable suburban territory adjacent to a great city and reaching out into the rural fringe, the leadership of one-fourth of the entire group of churches was being planned for by the supervising officer on essentially humiliating terms. He had set it down on paper that these churches would have to be served either by unmarried men or by superannuates living on a pension. In two cases even this type of provision was beyond the situation and he expected the churches to pick up transient supplies as best they could. In still other cases it was evident that Negro ministers were expected to live on salaries below the level of presumed



decency for white families. The choice for the ministers of this fourth of the sixty churches was enforced celibacy or superannuation or the acceptance of substandard living conditions.)

6. With this naturally goes a high turnover of ministers and high cost of administration, as perplexed executives try to supply churches of this type with a procession of short-term workers.

7. The majority of the over-small churches are also handicapped in the attempt to carry out standard ideals either of worship, religious education, or a church organization as recommended by their respective denominations. The official standards of the churches simply cannot bring themselves down to the level of a great multitude of their own institutions.

8. The church which has not enough people to work with simply cannot be a satisfactory unit of pastoral administration. Superficial consideration might lead one to suppose that a minister with only twenty families in his parish could give twice as effective guidance and oversight as he could if he had forty. The fallacy of this notion lies in the fact that pastoral guidance and discipline are primary functions of the Christian community, in which the minister is important but incidental. It takes a well-balanced, cross-sectional group of Christians, in which old and young are associated in due proportion, to safeguard the souls of its members. In the over-small congregation these functions turn to captiousness and censoriousness.

9. The over-small churches are not self-perpetuating Christian communities and cannot be because they are not a fair cross section of human life and do not contain enough young people of marriageable age to permit most marriages to be made within the religious community. Consequently they are forever losing their young people and failing to reproduce the continuity of the Christian stock. It is both a sociological and a religious question whether God ever intended such fragmentary human groups to assume to function as worshipping and serving congregations.

10. At least such situations do not bring out the best in Christian character. The most institutionally minded Christians are not members of the highly organized and staffed churches of the great cities—where the institutional machinery can largely be taken for granted—but the poor folk of the over-small churches who must be burdened every moment with the problems of the institutional survival of their enterprises. Frequently the cost per capita for their impoverished ministries is higher than that of the great and effective churches.

In a day of national crisis and decision, what, one begins to ask, is the value of keeping up such multitudes of substandard and, on the whole, denominationally unprofitable enterprises? Is it not possible in the presence of the emergency which vitally involves these churches, even when it does not appear to, that the churches should reconfront the situation in a large and comprehensive way?

#### *Working Principles*

Principles of co-operative action applying to such situations may be formulated on the basis of the long experience of the co-operating denominations with comity in small communities as follows:

1. It should be acknowledged as a goal that *the churches should seriously try to clear up all situations for which their consciences would not permit them to appropriate missionary money through the national Boards* if that were



involved. Home Mission Boards and Councils of Churches have not exhausted their responsibility when they have cleared their own immediate skirts. They still owe leadership to the denominations at large and to the lesser units of the churches.

2. Denominational authorities (after action in their general assemblies if necessary) should authorize and urge the subordinate units of churches persistently to seek this ideal and to use the present emergency as a basis for remedying the more flagrant situations.

3. The denominations should begin to re-educate their people, especially the constituencies of the smaller churches, to *want* higher standards of church life to the extent that they will be willing to adopt changes in local organizations. The consolidated school movement has long had to face the fact that many people prefer that which is poor and familiar to that which is good and unfamiliar. It is to be fully recognized also that there are two sides to the situation and that all measures of centralization must be matched by phases of decentralization, and particularly that rural communities whose churches are closed must not be deprived of frequent and active pastoral ministry on the part of the centralized churches. (See Section on "Situations Involving the Assignment of Exclusive Areas to Particular Denominations," pp. 50-51.)

4. It should also be enunciated as a necessary principle, that the many excellent palliatives for over-churching which try to utilize all the existing churches (by associating them in co-operative programs, organizing them into circuits, larger parishes, etc.) must not be allowed to obscure the structural root of the evil which must ultimately be dealt with. The substandard quality of a vast number of American churches cannot be overcome except by reducing the number.

#### *Implementation*

As subsequent steps in procedure (following authorization by general denominational authorities as recommended above), (1) the compilation of a nation-wide master list of duplicative non-aided churches is suggested. This should be worked out state by state, through state-wide agencies with the co-operation of the local co-operative units such as ministers' associations.

(2) The periodic consideration of this list by the representatives of the denominations, the national mission boards and delegates from localities should follow until it has become an established habit.

(3) Actual adjustment would naturally come gradually. A considerable number of cases could be handled immediately in the light of such common convictions and understandings as would immediately emerge from facing the facts. Others would need to be remanded for further study, but should come up again for consideration without too great delay. There would remain a residuum which it would be unwise to attempt to tackle because the deeper conditions of agreement are not present. These would have to wait upon death or other providential intervention. It should, however, be possible along these lines to push forward with reasonable rapidity to the clearing up of multitudes of substandard situations.

#### IV. COMPLEX URBAN SITUATIONS OFTEN NOT ADEQUATELY ANALYZED

Comity has perhaps been more effectively practiced in cities than anywhere else, but its principles have been less adequately formulated. The elaboration



of principles and procedures has run ahead of necessary study processes which alone could make the procedure work effectively. At best the situation is complex and difficult to formulate.

#### *Cases Studied*

Renewed documentation of the problems of urban churchmanship was secured by the committee's recent field work from the Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton area and from metropolitan Philadelphia—also more incidentally from Salt Lake City and Baltimore.

Seattle is a city of exceedingly strong downtown central churches with city-wide parishes reaching far out into the suburbs for constituents. In a high-grade residential area, still generally socially desirable but now beginning to experience deterioration in parts, the majority of the local churches were found to be stationary or declining. But in this area the central churches and the stronger ones of the University area were found drawing off half as many members as the local churches could muster to their combined memberships. The churches of these two great local centers also took away many of the members living in the adjacent high-grade districts; so that the local churches of the district had little opportunity for outreach. Under this heavy competition most of them were suffering severely.

Again, in the middle-class residential districts of Seattle most affected by new defense housing, the churches, with few exceptions, were based on old rural neighborhoods which existed as separate communities before annexation to Seattle. They averaged 120 members and budgets of from \$1000 to \$2000. Their parishes were small and compact and many of the churches were stationary or declining. The central churches got members from these districts to an extent equalling one-half of the entire membership of the local churches. Now comes the great influx of defense industry workers and the construction of hundreds of new housing units. This challenging opportunity finds most of the local churches below the level of effectiveness necessary to attract and assimilate the new population.

Previous to the war boom Seattle had had a stationary population for a decade. But the metropolitan district immediately surrounding the city grew more than fifty per cent during that period. In connection with this impressive suburban growth no conspicuous suburban church of any denomination had emerged. In most of the suburban districts the survey located scores of members belonging to the central churches of the city. Frequently there were enough to make an effective suburban church if they were all put together. But, in flagrant contrast with Tacoma, no denomination in Seattle had at any period had a definite policy of colonization and the development of strong secondary churches. As a consequence only six churches of the co-operating denominations in the entire city outside of the downtown and University centers, had as many as 500 members.

In extreme contrast with Seattle, the Philadelphia study revealed a situation in which, with very few exceptions, the central churches had long been unable to hold distant constituencies. Indeed the decline of population in the central city set in as early as the 1880's. The central churches as a group have had thirty years of retrogression. In view of this longer-time process and the greater size of the city, the forces of persistence and recovery have not been able to operate as strongly as in smaller places where changes have not been going on so long. In view of Philadelphia population trends, both quantita-



tive and qualitative, the best that the churches now occupying the greater part of its area can expect is an orderly recession. This requires even greater courage and devotion in co-operative churchmanship, and greater consecration, than to make a similar general advance. These illustrations serve to point the complexity of the urban problem.

#### *Common Elements*

Common elements in urban situations, in spite of wide variations, are:

1. Co-operative relations are quite as important between churches of the same denominations in cities as between those of different denominations. A constructive policy of churchmanship within each communion might emerge from a general co-operative policy.

2. Tension between churches of the center and the circumference of cities always exists, but appears in strikingly different phases. In Seattle the strength of the central churches had prevented the development of adequate outlying churches, while in Philadelphia the robbing of the central churches by the outlying churches had strikingly contributed to the general recession of the churches at the heart of the city.

3. In all these cases the supply of churches should be relative to available population. Very great subtractions from total population must be made for non-Protestant and non-assimilable elements, as well as for people who are churchless elsewhere or are not amenable to any religious appeal.

4. A great variety of variable factors, rather than any simple set of principles, has to govern decision as to any specific case of urban church strategy, such as the establishment of new churches, the removal or combination of old churches, major changes of policy and development of suburban fields.

5. As is characteristic of all the more complicated relations of urban civilization the effect of decisions is often so remote and difficult to discover that their ethical quality is hard to discern. What comity as a spirit of brotherly co-operation ought to mean and how given cases should be decided in cities are frequently harder to determine than under simple rural conditions.

#### *Working Principles*

It should, however, be possible to formulate working principles of co-operative action as regards complex urban situations. They should cover the following points:

1. A continuous process of co-operative planning should go on in advance of any crystallization of denominational purpose. The corporate mind should precede and, in the original sense of the word, should *prevent* the denominational mind; that is to say, should keep so far ahead of it that the denominational mind should never need to exert itself separately.

2. Intensive theoretical studies covering all situations should be made, like the studies in strategy of a war college which fights theoretical battles with all possible enemies. Every city district and every emerging suburb should be churchless on paper before anyone is asked to make a decision as to its actual churching. One then would never come at a problem "cold" or in isolation. The adequate churching of great cities will never be arrived at in any other way.

3. Each "comity" case would then be settled by a competent weighing of complex factors. To found or to move or to change a program of a church radically one would consider (a) distance from existing churches, never in isolation but always in relation to density of population. (b) The structure of the city should also be considered, especially its transportation system.



(c) As already indicated available population should be carefully estimated, subtracting Jews, Catholics, non-assimilable peoples and normal constituents of other churches, together with those who obviously would not have social affinity for a proposed church. (d) Adequacy of plan and resources as well as the openness of the field should always be considered.

4. These discouragingly complex requirements are stated only to say that cases can be determined with a considerable measure of scientific accuracy if the forces of co-operative churchmanship are willing to take the pains to approach the facts through well-established techniques.

#### *Implementations*

1. As a measure of implementation it should be insisted that the function of continuous survey and planning be somehow provided for by all responsible Councils of Churches or of Home Missions. The work can be departmentalized in any one of a variety of ways, but in one way or another *it is essential that it be done.*

2. The experience over a period of years of the more highly developed City Councils in their comity processes substantiates the above account of complexity of the problem, but also demonstrates the steps necessary for its solution.

3. The present committee has had the assistance of the Committee on City and Bilingual Work of the Home Missions Council in developing a statement of "Principles of Urban Comity" (p. 57), which it recommends for adoption by the appointing bodies.

## V. SITUATIONS INVOLVING SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF NON-PROTESTANT ANTECEDENTS

The customary analysis of the territorial fields of Christian service included in home missions enumerates them geographically and according to the types of communities involved. This method, however, very soon finds itself confronted by situations dominated or greatly modified by the presence of "special" populations, particularly those of non-Protestant antecedents. Such populations are distinguished also by cultural, linguistic and generally by economic differences from the usual Protestant type. In spite of their obvious diversity they will be considered here as presenting a single group from the standpoint of comity.

#### *Exceptional Populations Identified*

The list of the commonly recognized exceptional populations is long and varied, ranging from Alaska to the West Indies, and including such diverse types as Orientals, American Indians, Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest, as well as populations, particularly of Southern and Eastern European origins, congregated in urban centers and diffused throughout the industrial sections of the nation. Besides their characteristic non-Protestant antecedents, and their cultural, linguistic and general economic differences, the entire group tends to be characterized by the high per capita cost of Christian ministries as rendered by home missions; by the denominationally unprofitable character of much of the work—which has yielded small returns for the investment of money and effort expended,—and by the exigent need of many of the people concerned for adjustment to the demands of an unfamiliar culture.

(The present classification omits from the category of special populations



some which have customarily been found there but which this Report treats in other connections. The special status of the Negro churches is discussed on page 13; that of the Mormon area on page 50.)

#### *Variety of Characteristics and Problems*

In addition to ranging from the Arctic to the Tropical Zones, and from the Northwestern to the Southeastern outposts of American territory, each group identified as a special population presents its own cultural, linguistic and other group outlook. This has necessarily involved a variety of methods in Christian service which makes it difficult to give a general version of co-operative method or the practice of comity.

Furthermore, in practiced missionary administration, each group, in the main, has been separately interpreted by its own experts and partisans, whose divergent, and even shifting, policies are not always easily woven into a single story. There has, on the other hand, already appeared considerable tendency to think of the special populations as belonging to a single group as regards missionary policy; so that the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of Churches (on April 13, 1939) passed a resolution favoring the interdenominationalizing of the entire body of work for exceptional populations as commonly identified.

#### *Existing Co-operative Activity*

The current status of co-operative activity of the churches for the special populations is marked by the wide variety of methods used to overcome duplication and competition. Some of them fall considerably short of the average practice of comity for normal populations, while others go much beyond it. Thus a territorial division of fields among denominations (outside of the major cities) has been in effect in Porto Rico from the beginning of the American occupation, and to some extent exists in Cuba. Comity in certain cities has taken the form of assigning particular populations to particular denominations. Special co-operative organizations, analogous to Councils of Churches among normal populations, have been developed in Alaska, the Spanish-speaking Southwest and Porto Rico. The prevalence of union projects is also noteworthy throughout the West Indies. They also exist to some extent in the fields of publication and education for Spanish Americans and Orientals.

Joint supervision, and sometimes joint administration, of extensive phases of work are currently in operation in Alaska, as well as with the American Indians, Orientals, and Spanish American work. Local union churches have become frequent among Japanese Americans, and more than occasional in work for foreign-speaking populations in American cities. Finally, united churches, ecclesiastically independent but jointly supported by several denominations, exist in Santo Domingo and Porto Rico and the establishment of one for Alaska is under discussion.

#### *Working Principles*

The following working principles would seem reasonably to emerge from the situations as discovered.

1. Where work for the special populations has already evolved beyond the comity stage, push forward with more fundamental forms of co-operation and unity.
2. Where established urban and rural practices and procedures in comity are applicable to the special populations, use them so far as they fit, with the necessary adaptations. The Chicago Church Federation, for example, handles



all comity matters through a general commission, but has a special committee on Foreign Origin Groups charged with making recommendations to the Comity Commission on matters relating to these groups.

3. In connection with the establishment of new churches, adopt a highly realistic version of "available" population—that is to say, the per cent actually amenable to Protestant religious ministries.

4. Where non-Protestant populations of European origin have detached themselves from the older foreign-speaking colonies and have become diffused among the general population in cities, the primary object should be to assimilate them into the fellowship and life of the American churches rather than to set up special churches labeled according to foreign origins.

5. As an intermediate step between complete assimilation and mission status, the establishment of federations of churches of foreign origins with American churches may well prove a helpful method. Federation puts the two churches together on an equality, at the same time preserving enough of the special characteristics of each original church and allowing for gradual further modification.

6. In general, a realistic sense of the different stages of development of a church of foreign origin should be recognized in comity arrangements. So long as the foreign language is the language of preaching and worship, a church using it is not to be thought of as in direct competition with an English-speaking church of the same nationality. As soon as the foreign language is abandoned for English, the question for comity adjustments becomes a live one.

7. Expect the agencies most directly concerned with any given population (Special Committees, especially of the Home Missions Council, and the locally organized agencies of the special population groups) to press forward on the lines of development which each is already following, but with a keener sense of the relationships of their special groups to the total movement of comity and co-operation.

8. Organize united congregations related to several denominations wherever they furnish the best local solution. The denominations have frequently found it more natural to unite congregations of the special populations than to use the same method with normal American groups. (For further discussions see pp. 51-55.)

9. Make special efforts to develop sympathy and understanding with the churches of the Eastern Orthodox Communions, and extend comity to them. This is especially important in view of the large participation of the Eastern Orthodox Communions in the ecumenical movements, their obvious need of understanding sympathy on the part of the Protestant forces of the United States, and their sensitiveness upon this point. (See memorandum of John R. Mott to the Joint Executive Committee on Life and Work and Faith and Order.)

### *Implementation*

The direct implementation of these principles should remain in the hands of the special co-operative agencies or joint committee concerned with each of the exceptional populations. Each of these agencies should, however, carefully study this Report as a whole in its bearing upon its work for a given exceptional population.



The Home Missions Council might well erect an inclusive standing committee on special populations, which would continuously regard them from the generalized standpoint adopted by this section of the Report, and make more specific formulations of their current needs and further steps for treating them co-operatively as a single group.

## VI. SITUATIONS PRESENTED BY SPARSELY POPULATED TERRITORY, FREQUENTLY INVOLVING THE ASSIGNMENT OF EXCLUSIVE AREAS TO PARTICULAR DENOMINATIONS

The problem of the responsibility of particular denominations for the religious occupation and cultivation of somewhat extensive areas arises chiefly in regions of sparse population and largely in the Western states. These states were the scene of some of the most aggressive and fruitful of earlier comity efforts (p. 20). One of their characteristics is the prevalence of physiographically defined regions, intermountain and other "empires." In the main these sub-regions are socially tributary to a few large centers (Salt Lake City, Spokane, Denver, etc.). In spite of the large percentage growth of these states as a group, all of them include extensive sparsely populated physiographic provinces which have lost population with the fluctuating fortunes both of irrigation, dry farming, and the grazing industry. Here is much space, few people, and many challenging and still unsolved problems of co-operative churchmanship.

### *Cases Studied*

Such situations were studied chiefly in Utah and the surrounding regions of the "Mormon empire." Old and shadowy comity understandings, unrevised for years in spite of dramatic changes which had taken place, were supposed to have assigned great sections of territory for occupancy by this denomination and that. In one case the Indian had long been displaced by the settler without readjustment of responsibilities. In another, scores of Christian academies, which were once the backbone of missionary work in the area, had been discontinued; but neither basic change had led to a comprehensive reconsideration or modification of denominational assignments.

### *Common Elements*

Common elements in these situations were as follows:

1. It was obvious that many of the people of the great open spaces were not well served religiously.
2. Some denominations had not recently fulfilled their obligation of occupancy and cultivation to any adequate extent.
3. Mainstream occupancy had proved itself not to be the sole or perhaps the main method of religious service in much of this territory.
4. Careful calculation of the available population frequently shows a majority of non-Mormons in territory which was traditionally Mormon.

The outcome of the intermountain survey at this point was action by the 1942 Conference of Evangelical Churches referring such typical situations to the rural experts of the co-operating denominations. These experts will presumably work out a generalized formulation of comity principles applicable to areas of sparse population on the basis of a series of regional surveys. In general it seems likely that an integration of the work of the colporteur and



the Sunday school missionary with that of the pastorate of the organized church will have to be devised to meet the needs of such situations.

Other elements of the situation, common to the Western mountains and high plains, include:

1. Intensive concentrations of populations around urban centers and in irrigated valleys coupled with great diffusion and sparsity of population over most of the area. There is nothing like the relatively even distribution of population as it exists in the typical agricultural states of the Middle West.

2. As already noted, novel and largely non-institutional forms of ministry will probably have to be devised to meet such conditions. Such conditions define essentially missionary territory in which "self-support" by resident people (except in urban centers) can be expected only in a small degree.

#### *Working Principles*

As tentative principles of co-operative action for such situations the following are suggested:

1. The re-assignment of territory covering sparsely settled areas to the co-operating denominations for religious occupancy and cultivation. This should often take the form of the assignment of sectors of territory surrounding urban centers or of physiographically defined areas.

2. There should be agreement as to reasonable standards of occupancy, both as regards the religious staff to be employed relative to the available population and the financial support undertaken.

3. There should also be agreements as to the non-institutional methods and criteria of adequate ministries. The enrollment of Christian families for correspondence and to receive religious visitation, and the periodic ministries of the sacraments without membership in any local congregation, as well as the development of religious radio, are suggested as essentials of the method.

4. All work undertaken in assigned areas should emphasize the community-mindedness of religion, the concern of the church for the economic struggles of the people, as well as ecumenicity of spirit which should bind them not to any single denomination but to the whole church of Christ throughout the world.

#### *Implementation*

As to procedures, it is suggested (1) that the Home Missions Council might take the initiative, along with State Councils and Councils of denominational Superintendents, in re-apportioning all the sparsely settled territory of the nation for religious care and cultivation to some denominational body or to the denominations working through common agencies. It is to be presumed that special types of work like that for the American Indian would increasingly be done through united agencies. This would be similarly true for agricultural migrants and other special groups.

2. The rural experts of the denominations, associated in the Town and Country Committee of the Federal Council and Home Missions Council, should be asked to give persistent attention to the problem of sparsely settled areas until they are in position to recommend suitable co-operative methods and programs.

## VII. SITUATIONS INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Comity is primarily concerned with the relationships of denominations, and starts with the assumption that denominational enterprises affect one



another's fortunes. It goes on to ask which denomination, in a given situation, should be assigned a field or be permitted to undertake a piece of work.

But why is it logically necessary to assume that the situation requires any denomination, and why should the matter not be approached on a community basis rather than a denominational one? The answer is that, by and large, it is the denominations which are most genuinely concerned for co-operation in communities; it is largely their conscience and sense of responsibility which creates the problem. The community approach is, however, frequently the locally dominant one. It occurs so often that it has had to be dealt with in a large number of comity formulations. The cow bird's egg has contrived to get itself hatched in the sparrow's nest, and—like it or not—one has to ask what is to be done with the hungry bird?

#### *Types and Cases*

The result of the community approach has been the appearance of a wide variety of united local churches. There is no standard nomenclature by which they may be described. They belong to several major types—independent, interdenominational, federated, or denominational community churches—and for the purpose of the present discussion, it is not necessary to undertake a careful differentiation of these types which are described at length in community church literature. (See Douglass, *United Local Churches*, pp. 5-10.) The field work of the present study found one or more cases exemplifying the community approach to the problems of comity in nearly every one of the communities investigated.

#### *Common Characteristics*

The common characteristic of these churches is that they do not follow the usual denominational form. Besides taking a variety of forms they are not characterized by any one single motivation. The majority have come about as a result of local economic pressure, and have been opportunistic as to the means adopted, and the types of organizations selected. They represent no single theoretical viewpoint. One major idea, though one by no means universally held by the community churches, is that of the integration of the community through religion and around the church, and the application of religion to all spheres of life. Denominationalism is held to interfere with this ideal and the community approach is represented as ethically superior.

#### *Historic Attitudes*

From the earliest period of modern co-operation one finds several influential State Councils of Churches recognizing the community approach, and fostering community churches which have grown up in response to it. The Cleveland Comity Conference of 1928 admitted the principle of the community church and voted to "encourage the efforts of our Protestant Christian brethren to overcome the religious maladjustment which our multiple sectarian organizations have thrown upon them" (p. 22). In the same year a joint committee of the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council recognized "the primacy of the community interests" in making church adjustments in small communities, and the two Councils entered into a joint agreement to counsel and assist the community church movement with a view to preventing "the possible development of a new denomination" (p. 23). Opposition to the community churches in any form other than denominational nevertheless has continued, and tends to explain the vehemence of one of the findings of the Ohio Pastor's Convention in 1930:



District, state and national officials of the church are implored to give constructive leadership in securing, by proper consolidation, relief from the intolerable conditions of overchurching and underchurching in their respective territories. The best interests of the community and of the Kingdom as a whole are to be held supreme in planning and carrying out any consolidation.

#### *Current Status*

The current status of the community church movement is reflected in the most recent comity statements, several of which give it large recognition. Thus the revised Cleveland principles (1942) state: "Whenever the Comity Committee finds sentiment in a community strongly in favor of the organization of a community church, the Committee may designate one of the denominations to carry forward the work in the name of the Comity Committee until such time as the enterprise is ready to become a denominational church." Similarly, Cincinnati (1941) sets forth among the aims of the Comity Committee the following: "to survey new communities and to plan the strategic location therein of a limited number of non-competing churches which shall be sponsored jointly or by single denominations as recommended by the Committee." Chicago also makes provision for community churches as exceptions and has issued a series of thoughtful statements as the result of its long experience. (See p. 60.)

In 1940, the Home Missions Council appointed a new special Committee to renew its relations with the community church movement. In the previous year the Presidential address to this organization had advocated "co-operatively supported and serviced united Christian congregations" or the reciprocal exchange of fields in the adjustment of urban church situations. The resolutions of the Committee on the City and New Americans had for some years recognized "united church parishes," and the denominations concerned had been setting up such parishes in the numerous cities. On the contrary, the Baltimore scheme of 1942 for an "emergency housing larger parish," while recognizing the motives which have led to the establishment of the united churches elsewhere, attempted to meet the situation in a novel way preserving entirely the denominational forms. (See pp. 62-63). The more usual reaction has been that of the comity committee of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, which recently recognized as interdenominational a church newly organized in one of the pre-war government housing projects, adjacent to Milwaukee. The exceptional situations presented by temporary housing projects have already been noted (p. 37). Thus the Secretary of a Council whose formal principles explicitly declare that it "will allocate a new community *only* to a denominational community church" has now to plan for a large housing project for defense workers. He writes:

"The problem which arises with our comity group is how can they best serve this community with an interdenominational church. This question is now in the hands of a committee. It would seem to me that in view of the rapidly growing sentiment for Christian unity, it would be wise for the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council to work out a plan whereby an interdenominational comity group, such as our Department of Comity and Home Missions, can administer an interdenominational church in such a situation. My own suggestion would be that the State Council which is a cor-



poration, be authorized as the holding group for property purposes, and that the Department of Comity raise a special committee which shall have charge of the administration of such a project."

This is an example of a rather general trend.

#### *Working Principles*

In view of the historical and present status of the community church approach, it would appear to be reasonable to adopt the following as a set of working principles:

1. To reiterate the principle of "the primacy of community interests over denominational interests" in the churching especially of small or new communities, and the need of adjustment to the fact of demand for community churches in rather numerous cases.

2. At the same time reiterate the preference for denominational churches wherever possible, as expressed in the comity formulations of a larger number of Church Councils. This should be made conditional on the willingness of the denominational church to maintain a comprehensive fellowship of evangelical Christians, as well as upon the realization of minimum standards in the conduct of the enterprise.

3. Typical conditions calling for the making of exceptions in behalf of community churches should be determined and indicated, as in recent statements of the Cleveland, Chicago and Cincinnati Councils.

4. Provisions for actually determining the preferences of the people of a community would always be included in comity procedures.

5. Merging of denominational churches for special populations into community churches, in harmony with the resolution of the Home Missions Council Committee and the practice of numerous local Councils, should be favored.

6. Community churches of all types should be expected to embody an ecumenical version of the common faith and life along lines indicated in sections on emergency adjustments. (See pp. 39-40.)

#### *Implementation*

As measures for implementing the above, it would be appropriate:

1. To renew the joint relations of the Home Missions and Federal Councils with the community church movement, with a view to directing and stabilizing it.

2. State Churches should be encouraged to assist community churches when they have actually come into existence. Whatever position is taken toward their establishment, once they are in existence they should be enrolled, helped to find ministers, and, in general, brought in line with the ongoing common life of the churches expressed in councils. No independent or non-denominational church should be banished to the status of a permanent orphan.

3. The denominations, generally, should be asked to provide for dual memberships for the ministers of federated churches; so that the leadership of these churches may have the fullest possible status and advantage of relationship with all parent denominations. Such dual membership is provided for in a proposal favorably recommended by a department of the Presbyterian General Assembly, and referred to the presbyteries for action. (See Appendix, p. 68.)

4. The denominational churches should also be encouraged to provide for the dual status of community churches. Hitherto, they later have had only the alternatives of maintaining a single denominational connection, or



of having no denominational connection at all. But rather numerous actual cases have been developing in which the same church has been listed by more than one denomination, sometimes without formal ecclesiastical warrant. If the denominations would severally take some such action as the following, it would tend to meet such cases.

Whenever a church, previously consisting of a federation of ecclesiastical units, one of which was a congregation of this denomination, shall desire to drop its separate denominational rolls of members, and become one united church in the local community, yet is at the same time desirous of retaining unimpaired standing in both parent denominations; *resolved*, that such church shall be accorded such standing by this denomination, and shall be listed as belonging to it, providing that it continues actively in local fellowship with the local unit of this denomination, that it continues to include denominational interests in its benevolences and agrees that its minister shall become a member of the local unit of this denomination as far as permitted.

Since every child has two parents which it is expected to love and cherish equally, it should be possible for a church to have two denominational parents without diminishing its loyalty to either.



## APPENDICES

### I. THE ORIGINAL "MASTER LIST" AGREEMENT

*Procedure with regard to Aided Fields*

Adopted January 11, 1935

THE Secretaries of the five boards (i.e., Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Congregational-Christian, Reformed in the U. S., and Presbyterian, U. S. A.), who have co-operated in the preparation of the Master Lists of the aided fields of these denominations have agreed upon the following proposal as to procedure with reference to fields which appear to be competitive either with other aided churches or with self-supporting churches of these denominations. This proposal is being presented to each of the five boards for action at its January meeting.

1. Each board will, in whatever manner it deems appropriate, notify its denominational representatives, in each state for which the compilation of data is completed, as to the fields of that denomination which appear to be competitive, to permit verification, correction, or amplification of the data in hand.

2. The boards or their appropriate state bodies or local ecclesiastical unit will jointly submit all fields which appear to be competitive for consideration and adjudication by the Comity Committee of the State Home Missions Council or Council of Churches, where such a body exists.

3. The boards will unite in requesting the appointment of a special Joint Comity Committee in each state which does not now have a state Council with the understanding that such special Committee will represent at least those five denominations or so many of them as have work within the bounds of the given state. In such cases the fields which appear to be competitive will be submitted to the special Joint Comity Committee for consideration and adjudication.

4. Each board agrees to limit its grant to any field named on these Master Lists which appears to be competitive to the period ending October 31, 1935, pending consideration of such fields and recommendation thereon in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3.

5. Each board will urge that a similar procedure be approved by its denominational units which conduct their Home Mission work outside the budget of the board or which make supplementary grants to aided fields.

6. The boards will request the co-operation of the Executive Secretary of the Home Missions Council in the follow-up of all these cases. If possible, arrangement will be made to have one board representative and the Secretary of the Home Missions Council meet with each state group when these fields are considered. (See p. 25.)



## 2. URBAN COMITY PRINCIPLES

*Applicable to Metropolitan Communities consisting of a Central City,  
Outlying Residential Sections and Commuting Suburbs*

Approved by the Committee on City and Bilingual Work  
of the Home Missions Council, September, 1942.

1. Under conditions of average urban density of population, including the commuting suburbs, an area shall be regarded as adequately churchied which has (a) one church for 1,500 available population, (b) within a territory constituting a natural parish—that is, one in which the people are associated in the use of common facilities and (c) in which population is relatively homogeneous as to race and language, and (d) exhibits social affinity for the existing churches and (e) is not connected with churches elsewhere; provided also (f) that the existing churches receive into Christian fellowship all varieties of evangelical Christians without subjecting them to doctrinal and other tests which do not accord with the standards of their respective faiths. Cases of isolated Protestant minorities of less than 1,500 living at such a distance as to make attendance of existing churches impractical, may be regarded as exceptions to the above specifications. (Note also Paragraphs 5 and 9 below.)

2. The size of the exclusive parish of a given church should be dependent upon the density of population rather than upon fixed rules as to distance between churches. The parish should be associated with the area of intensive circulation of population as involved in other social relations; that is to say, with the neighborhood area of local school attendance, trade and recreation. In densely populated areas, the clustering of churches at focal points is not necessarily competitive, especially if the churches are complementary in character. In areas of medium density a distance of one-half mile between churches furnishes a rough criterion, and, in sparsely settled areas, one mile. These formulas for distance are illustrative of working criteria rather than exceptions to the rule that parish areas should be determined by actual social analysis in each given case.

3. A condition of overchurching shall be recognized when there is more than one church to 1,500 available population in a natural parish as above defined, especially when connected with (a) declining population, either absolutely or of that type of population which historically has furnished the constituency of the existing church; or (b) a condition of declining churches as to numbers, support, and character of programs; and (c) of increasing demand on the part of churches for denominational assistance.

4. In determining the normal religious provisions for an area so that it may be neither under-churched nor over-churched, qualitative considerations shall always be regarded. A working standard may be found in the average size, facilities, program and quality of leadership found in similar churches of this or similar cities, together with standards for urban churches advocated by representative denominations. (Suggested standards as to church buildings and appointments have been suggested by the Interdenominational Bureau of Architecture, associated with the Home Missions Council. See Appendix, p. 59.)

5. In urban situations, comity decisions must be made in the light of those prospective changes which are habitually characteristic of cities with the



growth of peripheral and suburban areas. Such needs should be met by the assignment of parishes to the co-operating churches (a) under joint planning, (b) with adequate consideration in each particular case for the adequate churching of the community; also (c) with due regard for adequate opportunity for all co-operating denominations, and (d) in harmony with the wishes of the people of each locality.

6. But cities also habitually present the necessity of the contraction of churches to meet declining population and deterioration in central and older areas. This need should be met (a) by orderly withdrawal; or (b) the consolidation of existing churches; (c) or by the co-ordination of their programs within a united church project; (d) or by the succession of Protestant churches of other races or traditions; (e) or by adaptations of program.

7. The whole process both of expansion and contraction should be a matter of continuous study rather than of isolated decision in individual cases.

8. Normally, necessary adjustments to meet these changes should be made by the proper location and adaptation of denominational churches; but inter-denominational projects may be developed whenever the best interests of a given community require it.

9. In the case of exceptional populations, national or linguistic, a realistic definition of available population should be insisted upon. On the one hand, the possibility of the assimilation of divergent populations by existing churches, with the consequent modification of church programs, should be fairly considered. On the other hand, the actual likelihood of their accessibility to Protestant ministries should be appraised in the light of experience. Competitive expenditures of mission funds should be regarded as particularly inexcusable in the case of non-Protestant populations, and interdenominational solutions in the service of such populations should be freely used.

10. As between the centrally located and the peripheral churches only general considerations can be indicated. The central churches bring prestige, often a high quality of services and superior advantages to their individual constituents; all of which are of value to the total cause of religion in the city. But most of the central churches are bound to come to the point at which nearby population and financial support will diminish. Their claims should be adjusted progressively to those of the outlying churches.

11. The outlying churches should be developed on a selective basis in growing residential areas and promising suburbs, according to definite plans of colonization. Under such plans the central churches ought to be willing to surrender members at a reasonable rate both for the sake of the religious solidarity of the family and the nurture of its youth, and in order to assure the development of strong outlying churches. But they should not be called upon to surrender members to inferior churches, unnecessary in numbers, unable to maintain reasonable standards, and planlessly established. If co-operative planning can undertake to develop a reasonable number of outlying churches located so that all have a chance to develop adequately, the downtown churches which are no longer needed on account of population changes should progressively transfer their strength to the residential sections.

12. Not all the downtown churches can possibly survive. Some should move, others may continue for prolonged periods to render highly essential services, although with a reduction of strength; still others should remain



indefinitely with radical adaptations of program and with support from outside the parish.

13. The applicability of these principles depends upon a faithful and continuous use of the methods of co-operative church planning and of the comity procedures which have been established and justified by experience. Even the most complex of urban situations is resolvable by painstaking analysis and can be solved in the light of general co-operative purpose and strategy.

14. The principles of comity applicable to town and rural fields, as developed by the Home Missions Council, are regarded as supplementing these principles and may apply to small and detached suburbs. (For text see p. 22 of this Report.)

### 3. RELATION OF COMITY TO CHURCH PROPERTY

*Suggestions by the Interdenominational Bureau of Architecture, July, 1942.*

1. National Church Erection Boards are urged to arrange their administration of loan funds or grants so that conditional mortgages or encumbrances on abandoned property will not be obstructive to church unity where the Christian people in a community desire to readjust church relationships. It is further urged that national bodies encourage their synodical or other regional groups to administer their church property funds so they likewise will not prove detrimental to church unity.

2. In the interest of Christian unity and co-operation, it is recommended that the agreement, already reached in the Church Building Committee of the Home Missions Council, that no board or department represented in the committee should encourage purchase by their groups of distressed property of another denomination, be continued and extended.

3. In view of the great number of communities that are unprovided with suitable church buildings, comity programs should seek constructively to encourage more adequate housing of worship and other needed Christian ministries.

Before assigning a new field to a denomination, assurances should be given regarding the adequacy of the physical equipment to be provided within a reasonable time.

4. A church may be said to have properly occupied a field when a church building has been erected and so financed that its current work is not handicapped by a burdensome debt, and the building so erected is well designed and contains suitable facilities for worship services and administration of the sacraments and ordinances satisfactorily to the various constituents of the church; rooms for educational and social work; with provisions in the plans of the building for enlargement as the work and congregation require.

5. In urban communities, the church building should provide for classes and groups and a possibly wide range of activities of community service; rooms must be available for flexibility of use and program. A chapel (in addition to the main sanctuary) should be provided for special services of worship and devotion, and for private and family devotion, for weddings, baptisms and funerals. An adequate provision must be made for recreational and social work. Usually this will require a larger room with, if possible, a minimum unobstructed floor area of 36 x 60 feet and a minimum ceiling height of 14 feet. A kitchen and a stage should be provided for use in connection with



this room. In addition to this fellowship hall, smaller rooms are needed for table and floor games, reading and lounge rooms. At least one of these should have a fireplace and kitchenette.

6. Before expenditures for plans and building improvements and equipment are incurred, the program of activities and services needed should be developed. Then professional counsel should be engaged for the task of planning the building and equipment program, in addition to the architectural service.

#### 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF CHURCHES IN NEW COMMUNITIES VIEWED FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

*Statement prepared by a Sub-Committee of the Chicago Church Federation*  
Adopted June 1, 1927

Your sub-committee recognizes that there is a growing desire to have only one Protestant church in a new community, so long as the community is so small that the work can be done easily by one church. It is here at the beginning that the problem arises as to which denomination should enter, or indeed, whether the proposed church shall be a union church of some kind. The problem is how to obtain the widest possible interest and co-operation, consistent with loyalty to a truly Christian Protestant Church.

##### I. *Advantages*

We who are on the sub-committee are in denominations and it is likely that we approach the subject, although it may be unconsciously, with a denominational bias. However that may be we desire to express our sense of the advantages of denominational approach.

The beginnings of a church in a new community mean usually that such a church is something of a missionary project. This is true not only as to finances, but as to all those features which make up a Christian church. This is especially true of a church at the beginning when everything is in the making, and when the spirit and character of a church for years to come is largely determined. To effect this a denominational church with its experienced church leadership, its definite standards of Christian teaching and living, its program which involves a world-wide as well as a community service, will have, if there be the co-operation of the community as a whole, a greater likelihood of raising up a more truly Christian church. To specify these advantages with more particularity we submit the following:

1. A denominational church is at once related to the total program of a denomination and catches its spirit. It does not become a purely locally-centered church, as a community church is more prone to do.

2. It has a clearly understood way of interpreting the Christian message and life.

3. However the denominations may differ, by reason of their history, traditions and teaching, the denominational church has come to hold certain standards which are widely understood, and which (by reason of such history and traditions) exert an influence for good upon the community.

4. The denominational program which has certain large objectives, which objectives express the special religious consciousness of the time-spirit, is in



the hands of the most highly trained of responsible leaders which the denomination affords, and thus the local church is led to adopt new methods and to place new emphasis upon the content of Christian teaching as well as the method for it.

5. The denominational church is provided with facilities for training men for the Christian ministry, whose Christian spirit and character have the approval and constant supervision of the denomination itself.

6. It is usually difficult to organize new churches without financial aid contributed from outside the local group. The denominational church can more readily secure the financial backing of the denomination. But more than this, there is constant supervision by those intrusted with church management; and also assistance in organization, programs, goals, etc., which a community church by its very nature does not have.

## II. *Difficulties of Denominational Approach*

1. A new community is usually a small one. It is deeply impressed with the oneness of its interests. Financially, socially, educationally, the people regard themselves as their brothers' keepers. The introduction of a denominational church seems to divide. Historical differences, and personal religious attitudes make it impractical for all Protestant people to drop their former affiliations and unite with another denomination, whose doctrines may be somewhat different, and whose practices may be largely different from those to which they have been accustomed.

2. Denominational aims and programs, and societies also within the denominations, as well as the long friendships which would become of necessity less intimate and delightful, deter many in a community from transferring their loyalty to another denomination.

3. Frequently there is no preponderance of one denomination over another, not enough at least to give one group a natural right to bring in its denomination. The people find it by no means easy to decide for themselves which denomination they should enter, nor do they rise up with one mind to welcome the one which may be brought in even by the Comity Commission.

4. Our time is one in which the people are averse to theological controversy. There is a wide feeling that the various denominations are more or less sectarian and competitive. As such, a denominational church seems at this point to divide, and as such it is not welcomed.

5. The varied strength of the denominations, and the differing amounts, financially, which these denominations will give to a project, or on the other hand, the possible failure of a denomination to adequately back one of their churches, give grounds for opposition in communities to this or that church entering a field.

## *Conclusion*

On the whole we are satisfied that, judged solely from the contribution which a denominational church could make, as compared with a non-denominational one, the interests of the Kingdom are more truly advanced by having a church which is organically related to one of the established Protestant groups.

The sub-committee believes that at the present time the denominations provide the best available foundation for the building of the local church, and that no matter what may be the ultimate form of the religious organization which we call the church, that now as it enters new communities the best



interests of the future will be served by continuing the principle of denominational affiliation. Accordingly we recommend that the Comity Commission continue to hold its position in favor of the denominational church in new communities, in all cases where the public sentiment will effectively endorse this principle, with the understanding that a denominational church shall seek to minister to the needs of the entire Protestant constituency, and not aim to glorify one denomination nor one special set of doctrines. In cases wherein the views of a local group are difficult to unification, and where there is a definite objection to a denominational church, then we should cheerfully consent to such modification as may be necessary, thus respecting the convictions of a worthy group of truly Christian people who may wish to build a church in a different way. In such cases we shall feel it our duty to foster the Christian welfare of such a church with its community—

1. By relating it to the spirit and program of other churches;
2. by urging upon it a definite religious program;
3. by helping it to a world program and thus preventing it from the self-destruction of living only for its own self;
4. by helping it to noble, positive, and enlarging programs of Christian thought and endeavor.

## 5. EMERGENCY HOUSING LARGER PARISH OF BALTIMORE

*Committee on Comity, Council of Churches and Christian Education of Maryland, Delaware.*

Adopted May 19, 1942. (Condensed Statement)

The Emergency Housing Larger Parish is "essentially a plan of co-operative action in which the communions plan to meet together the need for housing areas which have uncertain futures."

The plan calls for interdenominational action under denominational leadership. The co-operative denominations accept responsibility for organizing and maintaining temporary churches and organizations in localities agreed upon, "under conditions which make them genuine representatives of the total cause of Christ in the community."

Each co-operative denomination agrees to support the total program of such a parish by urging all their constituents in the area to associate themselves with the church or with its congregation.

As procedures for carrying out this agreement the appropriate Committee of the Council of Churches first declares the project under consideration to be an emergency housing project with an uncertain future.

Interdenominational services—Sunday school, worship, young peoples meeting and so forth—are then to be established at the earliest possible moment, and to be continued until final responsibility for the area is assigned.

The Council then invites some one or more denominations to assume responsibility for the project.

When a communion accepts a project it becomes financially responsible for carrying it out.

The denomination receiving the assignment organizes and maintains a denominational church according to its own usages, not modifying any of its requirements for church membership.



As supplemental to the denominational local church, a "congregation or Christian fellowship" is organized including all members of the church, and all other resident Christians who desire to associate themselves with it. A church so organized is in fact, and officially, a church of the particular denomination which receives the assignment, but is to be known locally simply as the church of ——— community, since it has been recognized by the other co-operative communions as representing the total cause of Christ in the community.

The individual Christian associating himself with the congregation may become formally a member of the church or may keep his membership in the church of his previous residence, or he may transfer to a near-by local church of his own denomination. Whatever his formal relation to the church, as a member of the congregation he receives its ministries and is expected to share in its support.

In commending the above plan the Committee pointed out that it does not involve any repudiation of historical ecclesiastical differences, but simply supplements a denominational local church with an interdenominational fellowship on a community-wide basis. The Committee believes that such a larger parish should reach eighty-five percent of all Protestants, who could be reached if there were several denominational churches in a given project, whereas it feels that a single denominational church without relationship to such a larger parish would be likely to reach only one half or less of the possible constituencies.

## 6. REVISIONS OF PRINCIPLES OF COMITY

*Comity Committee of the Cleveland Church Federation*  
March, 1942

The principle of church comity is the practice of Christian co-operation and brotherhood in the placement of new churches and the relocation of established churches for the best service to their communities.

For thirty years the Cleveland Church Federation has recognized the moral responsibilities of church comity and has sought, through proper committees, to work with and to aid the denominations and local churches in such a co-operative program.

The principle of comity rests upon two fundamental ideas:

- (a) Every community is entitled to the spiritual ministry of a Christian church.
- (b) Every church is entitled to a parish of sufficient potential resources to justify a reasonable investment in a program and material equipments.

Through comity agreement the Federation seeks to lead in co-operative action to locate churches so that there shall be no overlapping of organized religious effort, and, at the same time, to provide each community with adequate religious services.

The Comity Committee shall be composed of two officially delegated representatives from each denomination actively affiliated with the Federation or willing to enter into the processes of discussion involved in the items of principle set forth, as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED:



1. That the Comity Committee shall deem it inadvisable to locate a new church or mission, under all normal circumstances, less than one-half mile from an established church or church site.

2. That whenever any denomination or local church proposes to establish a new church, Sunday school or mission, it shall submit its proposal *in writing* to the Comity Committee for consideration and approval.

3. That whenever two or more denominations propose to enter a community, the matter shall be referred to the Comity Committee to determine which denomination or denominations may go forward with their plans.

4. That whenever an established church proposes to re-locate in order to follow its constituency, or whenever two established churches combine and seek a new location, they shall lay their plans before the Comity Committee for approval. In such cases available locations shall be considered an important factor.

5. That whenever the Comity Committee finds sentiment in a community strongly in favor of the organization of a community church, the committee may designate one of the denominations to carry forward the work in the name of the Comity Committee until such time as the enterprise is ready to become a denominational church.

6. That the Comity Committee may undertake surveys of promising communities or needy areas, either on its own initiative or at the request of interested denominations, the findings to be reported at general meetings of the committee. It is assumed that necessary funds for these surveys will be provided by the interested denominations, when such requests are filed.

7. That whenever a case is reported to the Comity Committee, a sub-committee shall be appointed within ten days to take the matter under advisement for a period of not less than thirty days before making recommendations to the committee.

8. That whenever a denomination secures approval of the Comity Committee to enter a community in need of a church, it shall be given one year in which to organize the work, after which it shall be presented for review by the Comity Committee.

9. That the Comity Committee shall encourage such adjustments as will make possible the equipping and maintaining of *one* strong church in each natural parish and shall discourage the investment of mission funds in competitive enterprises in the same neighborhood.

10. That the denominational Church Extension Boards and the local churches shall formulate their church extension plans wholly within the spirit of these principles of comity.

11. That no final action of this committee shall be taken before due notice has been given to all denominational superintendents, and corresponding chairmen, in order that objections may be filed. All objections, or protests, must be filed within thirty days of the date of such notice.

12. That when action of the Comity Committee is not acceptable to one of the interested parties, appeal may be made to a Committee of Reference consisting of three judicially-minded laymen. These laymen shall be selected from a panel of seven elected by the Comity Committee annually. Decisions of this Committee of Reference shall be final.

13. That when any denomination or local church relinquishes its claim to an assigned area, or decides to discontinue an established work, it shall file



due notice with the Comity Committee. The committee shall then be free to reassign the territory to another denomination for occupation.

14. That all adjustments between co-operating denominations or churches shall be made a matter of record with the Comity Committee and that questions, if any, arising from such readjustments shall be subject to review.

15. That the Comity Committee shall meet quarterly to review all matters under its jurisdiction and to formulate reports for submission to the Board of Directors of the Cleveland Church Federation through the Inter-Church Relations Department.

## 7. CITY PRINCIPLES OF COMITY

### *The Ohio Council of Churches*

Adopted September, 1942.

The Ohio Council of Churches recognizes the following propositions as basic in any consideration of comity relationships between the co-operating communions.

1. The task of winning any city, or any considerable portion of it, to Christ is too great for any one of the existing communions but must be assumed as the common responsibility of all.

2. With such large areas of responsibility and opportunity in some cities and throughout the world in general untouched, it is to be regarded as unwise to permit undue overlapping and long neglect. Either of these conditions is alike harmful: the one, in the inexcusable waste of time, energy and money, the other, in the culpable neglect of needy sections and needy groups.

3. As a rule denominational enterprises are to be preferred over union or federated churches.

Therefore, the Ohio Council of Churches recommends that each city in the state, where it is possible to do so, organize a city council of churches or where this is impossible that a comity committee be organized for the purpose of dealing with problems of interdenominational interests. Also recommends that such councils or comity committee within a county establish and maintain the closest possible relationship and endeavor to apply the rules stated below and agreed upon by the co-operating communions with a view to—

1. Providing an adequate religious ministry for every section of the city. No group, social, racial, age, sex, or other, no family and no individual, should be without effective care.

2. Preventing both overlapping and overlooking of opportunities and responsibilities. Each neighborhood should be adequately churchled but not overchurchled.

3. Demonstrating to the city and to the outside the essential oneness in purpose and spirit of the churches of Christ.

4. To so classify neighborhoods economically, racially, socially, educationally, etc., and to make this information available to the several denominations.

### *Rules Governing Locations*

1. Whenever any new work, or change in location is contemplated the matter should be referred to a comity committee for review and counsel before taking decisive steps. The findings of the committee in all such cases shall be



made a matter of record and officially reported to all affiliated communions.

2. The comity committee shall deem it inadvisable to locate a new church or mission, relocate an established church within less than one-half mile from an established church or church site.

The churches located therein, however, should be organized to do intensive work within that unit of territory, doing periodical house-to-house, individual-to-individual personal work; of course, avoiding the appearance of proselyting the members of other churches living there and giving information to pastors concerned regarding members of their communions living in the area. It is recommended that block visitors be appointed for each city block included in the neighborhood parish with a system of reporting so as to keep the ministering churches in constant touch with incoming and outgoing families and individuals.

3. A denomination desiring to enter a community should give such notice of its desire in writing to the comity committee before it has become involved in any real estate or other financial obligations touching the field it desires to enter.

4. Other communions interested in the locality where it is proposed to locate the new church should be notified of the application for a new church and the committee should consider with the applicant all protests against granting it and should give opportunity for personal hearings to representatives of all interested parties.

5. In considering the application the comity committee shall make a survey of the community to discover conditions in the following respects which should be taken into consideration in deciding the question.

(a) The extent of the proposed plan.

(b) The fitness and responsibility of the organization to carry out the proposed work.

(c) The denominational traditions and religious preference of the population should be consulted, the principle of self determination should be recognized.

(d) Preference should be given to work already established, other things being equal.

(e) Usefulness in building the Kingdom shall be the determining factor in the beginning and continuance of the work.

6. Approval to enter a field for new work, or change of location, should be taken advantage of within one year from date, otherwise the approval shall be subject to review.

7. If at any time the judgment of any communion, another communion to whom a task has been assigned, is not adequately meeting the need, the entire matter may be called up for review by the committee.

8. In comity arrangements equities of every nature should be carefully conserved.

9. When a denomination shall establish a Mission, Church or Social Center, to minister to community life and need, which is not expected to become self-supporting, the committee on comity will discourage the establishment of similar institutions in the same neighborhood by any other denomination until said institution is on a safe financial footing or until the community is sufficiently large to require additional institutions.



### *General Considerations*

1. Temporary suspension of work shall not be regarded as abandonment of a field, but if it continues for longer than a year it should be reviewed.

2. Publicity should be given to the committee's decisions regularly in the newspapers so far as possible, through the pulpit and church bulletin, etc., thus aiding in developing comity sentiment.

3. The comity committee should consider as a definite part of its tasks the making of a statesman-like study of unoccupied and over-churched sections of the city and make this information available to the denominational leaders.

## **8. ACTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U. S. A.**

*Including Recommendations to Synods and Presbyteries Relative to Comity*  
From the Report of the Standing Committee on National Missions as Presented to and Adopted by the General Assembly, June 2, 1931.

The Committee has received from the Board the following memorandum on Comity and Co-operation and recommends that it be adopted by the General Assembly:

In the present stage of the discussion of comity and co-operation there are two things which it seems particularly necessary to do. One of these is to find a way to incorporate such comity principles as may be adapted into the practical administrative procedure of the Board and of the Synods and Presbyteries. The second is to find a way to have this whole subject more thoroughly discussed and more clearly understood in the Synods and Presbyteries which finally determine any action which may be taken by the Board with reference to local fields.

As an approach to the solution of these two problems, we recommend the adoption of the following:

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has repeatedly through many years declared its desire and conviction that our church should work in the closest fellowship and co-operation with all other evangelical churches and has expressed its disapproval of narrow sectarianism and divisive competition; and

WHEREAS, the Board of National Missions on the recommendation of its National Staff has stated that it is unequivocally opposed to the use of mission funds for the support of competitive enterprises; and

WHEREAS, there have been developed during recent years a considerable number of interdenominational organizations functioning in cities, states, or for the nation as a whole, in practically all of which organizations our church co-operates, and the number and practical value of such organizations is steadily increasing with effective comity and co-operation as a major objective; and

WHEREAS, various interdenominational agreements have been effected defining comity and outlining procedures of co-operation, the Findings of the North American Home Missions Congress held in Washington, D. C., in December, 1930, being a notable example of such agreements on principles and procedures, and



WHEREAS, the earnest desire manifesting itself among Christians everywhere for the unity of Christ's Church in the spirit in which Christ Himself prayed, makes it incumbent upon us to remove from National Missions the reproach of competition and un-Christian rivalry:

Therefore be it RESOLVED:

First, that this General Assembly declare its acceptance of the principle that the National Missions funds of the church ought not to be used for the support of enterprises which compete with other evangelical denominations.

Second, that the General Assembly instruct the Board of National Missions as follows:

1. That every present enterprise which is aided or proposed to be aided from National Missions funds which appears to be competitive with enterprises of other denominations which are constituent to the Home Missions Council shall be submitted by the Board for consideration and adjudication to the appropriate Committee of the interdenominational organization functioning in that area if one exists. If there is no such organization it shall be taken up with the proper representatives of the other denomination, or denominations concerned either directly or through the Home Missions Council. The granting of continuance of aid to such an enterprise shall be contingent upon the approval of such Committee or conference being secured.

2. That before any new enterprise be initiated or be aided from National Missions funds it shall be submitted by the Board for interdenominational approval according to the procedure stated in the preceding paragraph.

3. That building aid to any local enterprise by the Board of National Missions shall be subject to the same comity understandings and procedure as grants for current support.

Third, that the General Assembly request and urge these Synods and Presbyteries which administer their National Missions work outside of the budget of the Board of National Missions to accept the same principles and procedure laid down in the preceding paragraphs for the Board of National Missions.

Fourth, that the General Assembly transmit these actions to each Presbytery and Synod and earnestly request their hearty co-operation with the Board of National Missions in achieving the purposes and following out the directions herein outlined and that the Board of National Missions prepare a general informative statement to accompany these actions.

Fifth, that the General Assembly express its deep appreciation of the progress which has already been made in the development of co-operation and in the discontinuance of competitive rivalry and urge that this matter be kept before the attention of all our churches and ministers as a subject of prayer, education and definite constructive effort.

## 9. DUAL MINISTERIAL MEMBERSHIP

*Recommendations from the Department of Church Co-operation and Union to the Presbyterian U. S. A. General Assembly, May, 1942*

It is recommended that the following overtures be sent down by this General Assembly to the Presbyteries to be voted on in accordance with the provisions of Form of Government, Chapter XXIV, of Amendments, and that



they be accompanied by an explanatory statement which has been prepared at the direction of the Department by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

*On Amending Form of Government, Chapter X, by the addition of Section XIV providing for dual ministerial membership under certain specified conditions, said amendment to read as follows:* "A minister of this Church, who has become the minister of a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with another Church, or who has become for a limited period minister of a congregation of another denomination may, with the approval of his presbytery, accept for the period of such service ministerial membership in another denomination or denominations. Such additional ministerial membership, in whatever manner conferred, shall not alter said minister's status as a minister of this Church, or terminate or modify any of the solemn obligations he assumed by giving an affirmative answer to the questions of Chapter XV, Section XII."

"When a minister of this Church continues or accepts membership of any character in another denomination, except as is provided above, his presbytery shall record the fact, erase his name from the roll, and take such other actions of an administrative character as may be required by the Constitution."

"A minister of another Church in correspondence with the General Assembly who has become the minister of a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with this Church may be enrolled for a definite period as a member of a presbytery and have temporarily the rights and privileges of such membership; except that he shall not be elected as an officer of the presbytery or a delegate to a higher judicatory, or serve as a member of a permanent or special judicial commission or of an administrative commission appointed under the provisions of Chapter XXVI, Section XVII." (*Blue Book*, pp. 48-49.)

## 10. DUAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

*Action of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches,  
June, 1942*

That for any person who has interests in two denominations, one of which is the Congregational Christian, dual standing be approved, permitting him to be simultaneously a member of both, provided that the person involved manifest his interest in the Congregational Christian Churches

- (1) by contributing money or time to the fellowship in some phase of its work;
- (2) by reading the literature of the fellowship and so keeping in touch with its intellectual life;
- (3) and when possible, worshiping with his fellow Congregational Christians.



## II. CO-OPERATIVE RELIGIOUS MINISTRY IN HOSPITALS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

*Suggestions from the Commission on Religion and Health of the Federal Council of Churches.*

That the churches unitedly, through the Council of Churches if one exists or through the ministers' association if there is no Council, take such of the following steps as may be relevant—in order that the most appropriate, skillful and devoted religious ministry be given to patients or inmates of general, mental or special hospitals and penal or correctional institutions, and of other institutions—this service being supplementary to that performed by pastors to their own parishioners in such institutions.

1. Seek the creation of "official" chaplaincies in all large institutions, public or private, to co-ordinate the work therein of visiting pastors and to minister to those having no church connections or only tenuous ones, the standards and procedures being in line with those adopted by the American Protestant Hospital Association, 1940.

2. Seek to co-ordinate the services of "visiting chaplains" or "institutional missionaries" supported by denominations or interchurch bodies—to the end that these services may be extended as widely as possible to those who need them, and that the largest measure of respect for denominational preferences and affiliations be practiced.

3. Adjust situations in which there is wasteful duplication of effort on the part of chaplains or visiting chaplains according to recognized comity procedures.

4. Where chaplains or visiting chaplains of competence and skill are already at work, secure the broadening of their commissions so as to make them representatives of all the co-operating churches.

5. Help to promote more positive understanding of and activity in the field of religious ministry in institutions by special attention to such matters as the following: aiding chaplains to a better understanding of their common professional problems; aiding in community-wide interpretation of religious work in institutions; aiding institutions to strengthen their relationships with visiting clergy; aiding institutions in the development of policy with reference to lay religious workers; giving special guidance to Protestant hospitals that their common spiritual heritage may be conserved and strengthened; giving special aid in reference to ministry in mental hospitals; in all matters pertaining to public institutions, forming a united front, and appropriate organization thereto, so that the interests of the churches may be adequately and strongly represented in dealing with governmental authorities.

(For further suggestions, see *Religion and Health in the Local Community* by the Commission on Religion and Health, 1942.)

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